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The Truman Victory of 1948

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THE TRUMAN VICTORY OF 1948

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by

David Edwin Wallace

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¹David Lawrence, "Poor Mr. Truman" United States News and World Report, XLV (April 9, 1948), 26.

²Edward G. Corwin and Louis W. Koenig, The Presidency Today (New York: New York University Press, 1946), p. 11.

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND TREATMENT OF THE DATA

The results of the Presidential election of 1948 produced one of the most stunning upsets in the history of elections in the United States. The odds against Harry S. Truman's winning re-election were considerable. As President, he was following one of the outstanding politicians in American history, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.¹

In April of 1948, disaffected New Dealers and many city political bosses, feeling that Truman could not win the election, attempted to convince first General Dwight D. Eisenhower and then Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas to run for President on the Democratic ticket.² Up until the time of the Democratic National Convention in July, other influential members of the Democratic Party urged Truman to capitulate in favor of someone else. Political experts of both parties who were supposedly "in the know" were saying that Truman could not possibly be re-elected in the November election. During the Democratic

¹David Lawrence, "Poor Mr. Truman!" United States News and World Report, XXIV (April 9, 1948), 36.

²Edward S. Corwin and Louis W. Koenig, The Presidency Today (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 80.

Convention, some of the Southern delegates, angered by the civil rights plank established in the Democratic platform, walked out of the convention.³ Truman's image was by and large that of a well-meaning but bungling President, no better qualified to discharge his duties as Chief of the nation than the average man on the street. Furthermore, his simple, forthright and at times blunt manner alienated him from many of the "powers that be" in the Democratic Party.⁴ Thomas E. Dewey, his Republican opponent, was a young and efficient politician who had given Franklin Roosevelt a "run for his money" in the Presidential election of 1944.⁵ Henry Wallace had been nominated as a Presidential candidate on the Progressive Party ticket. This party was expected to take most of its votes from the Democrats.⁶ All of the major purveyors of predictions said that Truman did not have a chance.⁷ Yet in spite of the odds, Truman was re-elected to the Presidency in 1948.

³Ibid.

⁴"The Democrats Have to be Progressive," New Republic, CXIV (February 11, 1946), 88.

⁵"Republicans Start a New Political Era," Life, XXI (November 18, 1948), 31.

⁶Rexford G. Tugwell, How They Became President (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), p. 437.

⁷Ibid., p. 436.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, an effort was made to analyze all of the pertinent factors that led to victory for Harry Truman and defeat for his major opponent, Thomas E. Dewey, in the Presidential election of 1948. Secondly, there was an attempt made to discern why most of the media of prediction, including both amateur and professional forecasters, predicted that Thomas Dewey would win the Presidential election of 1948.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

History sometimes plays interesting tricks, and one occurred when Harry S. Truman became President of the United States. Here was a man who did not want to be President, for he himself said that he would have been happier serving his country as a United States Senator.⁸

Truman faced the most difficult of tasks, that of attempting to fill the shoes of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt was a man of great political powers (generally conceded by both friends and foes) and a magnetic personality. He had been at the nation's head for twelve

⁸Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope (Vol. II of Memoirs. 2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 19, 43.

years, including in that time span most of World War II. Truman was destined to be compared unfavorably to the "Roosevelt legend."⁹

Under these circumstances, Truman began his task; and for various reasons, by the year 1948, Truman was in trouble politically speaking. In fact, no one gave him very much of a chance to win.¹⁰

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important to historians in many ways.

- (1) Truman's victory in 1948 is considered one of the biggest political upsets of all time. The election of 1948 is unique in American history. Never had so many been so wrong about the outcome of a Presidential election.¹¹ This uniqueness alone makes the study of the election significant.
- (2) After the 1948 election, a mass of material was devoted to explaining why Truman won, where Dewey blundered, and why

⁹Peter R. Levin, Seven by Chance: The Accidental Presidents (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1948), pp. 265, 288.

¹⁰"Mounting Troubles That Can Spell Defeat for Harry S. Truman," United States News and World Report, XXIV (March 12, 1948), 34, 36; and "Fighter in a Fighting Year," Time, LIII (January 3, 1949), 10-11.

¹¹"The Victorious Rebellion of Harry S. Truman," Newsweek, XXXII (November 8, 1948), 3-4.

the polls were mistaken. Most of these accounts were prejudiced, and all lacked the partial perspective that the passage of time can give. One notable exception was the report on the pre-election polls of 1948, prepared by the Social Science Research Council, and even this report was more hastily prepared than it should have been. Since just after the election, there has been very little significant material written about the election. It is recognized that there have been many opinions, educated guesses, and sweeping statements made about the election. What is needed is an objective synthesizing and sifting of facts in order to discover exactly what happened in the Presidential election of 1948. (3) Truman's victory in 1948 is a study in masterful political campaigning, with an effective knowledge of human nature thrown in. Politicians and historians can use this election as a casebook of human nature and political maneuverability. (4) Truman was a controversial President. Whether he was a "great" President, a mediocre one, or somewhere in-between, only time will tell. This study should aid in the evaluation of Truman as a person and President. (5) Thomas Dewey, Truman's opponent, played a prominent role in American history for about ten years. Because of his prominence in the affairs of the nation, a study would be incomplete without an analysis of

his role in the Presidential election of 1948. (6) The terms "public opinion" and "public opinion poll" have been used for some time and seem to be here to stay. These terms are intangible and abstract at best. However, by a study of the election of 1948, the historian, sociologist, psychologist, and average person can increase their knowledge of public opinion and improve the techniques of public opinion polls. Above all, the historian and all concerned should get an idea of the usefulness of public opinion polls and their future in the United States.

IV. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study did not include a description of Truman's childhood years, or any of the formative period before he became President of the United States (when he was Senator and Vice President) unless it pertained to an analysis of Truman as the political figure who was re-elected to the office of President in 1948. His decisions while President and a general description of his tenure in office were referred to only when the odds against Truman's victory in 1948 were cited. His second term as President was not studied at all, nor was his retirement from the Presidency and subsequent life analyzed. A detailed biographical account of Thomas Dewey was not included in this study.

A brief resume of Dewey's political career prior to 1948, and a more detailed account of his personality and tactics were included in order to get a better perspective of the election of 1948. Henry Wallace and Strom Thurmond, other prominent Presidential candidates in 1948, were dealt with only superficially, and then only in connection with the odds against Truman's re-election, and in a statistical account of the final outcome. There was not a detailed analysis (state by state) of the election results. Only general statements were made about particular areas of the United States and their relation to the Truman victory. A more detailed study of the statistics presented by public opinion polls was presented. Only the factors deemed important to the Truman victory and Dewey defeat were dealt with. Important factors such as personality traits of Dewey and Truman, tactics of the two candidates, and the farm and labor vote were dealt with in detail. Public opinion polls were also studied in detail, as well as other less scientific forms of predictions, in order to determine why everyone predicted a Dewey victory. Through the study of the above-mentioned factors, an attempt was made to find out exactly why Harry S. Truman was the victor in 1948, after a near-unanimous prediction of his defeat was made.

V. COLLECTION AND TREATMENT OF DATA

Most of the information about the election of 1948 is contained in periodicals and newspapers such as Time, Newsweek, U. S. News and World Report, and the New York Times. Books such as the Truman Memoirs, biographies of Truman and Dewey, and the Pre-election Polls of 1948 were studied.

This study consisted of five chapters. Chapter II studied the background of the election, including the death of Franklin Roosevelt and its influence on the public's attitude toward Truman, a detailed study of the Truman and Dewey personalities, and a description of some of the odds against Truman's being re-elected to the Presidency. Chapter III was a detailed account and analysis of the campaign of 1948. Chapter IV dealt with public opinion polls and why they were wrong in their forecasts in 1948. These were dealt with from the standpoint of the average man, newspaper reporters, magazine editors, politicians, the pollsters themselves, and the Social Science Research Council. Chapter V gave the summary and conclusions gained from the study.

VI. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Public: In this study "public" was used as an intangible term describing a cross-section of the people of the United States.

Public Opinion: "Public opinion is the aggregate result of individual opinions--now uniform, now conflicting, of the men and women who make up society or any group of society."¹²

The American Institute of Public Opinion: This was the nation's leading public opinion poll in 1948, as organized by George Gallup. This institute attempted to analyze the election of 1948 and predict the outcome.

Upset: A colloquial term meaning extreme deviation from the norm.

Not only did Franklin Roosevelt have a loyal group of followers, he had the political ability to unite both liberals and conservatives in compromises. An analysis of the Democratic Party at the time of Roosevelt's death reveals a coalition of New Deal liberals, Southern leaders who opposed many New Deal measures, labor leaders sensitive about their position, and Midwestern farmers concerned about their own prosperity.

¹¹W. Kent Flitting and Eugene J. Carr, The United States: An Interpretive History (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 196.

¹²Edward L. Bernap, Crystallizing Public Opinion, (New York: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 1923), p. 61.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF THE ELECTION

The troubles Harry S. Truman was to encounter in the election of 1948 began on April 12, 1945, when it was announced that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Warm Springs, Georgia. Although many people hated Franklin Roosevelt and critics were divided as to whether or not he was a great President, he had guided America through twelve years of war and peace. Because of his oratory, charm, and shrewd political ability, he had collected a large following by the time of his death.¹

Not only did Franklin Roosevelt have a large group of followers, he had the political ability to unite both friends and enemies in compromises. An analysis of the Democratic Party at the time of Roosevelt's death reveals a coalition of New Deal liberals, Southern leaders who opposed many New Deal measures, labor leaders sensitive about their position, and Midwestern farmers concerned about their own prosperity.²

¹R. Kent Fielding and Eugene E. Campbell, The United States: An Interpretive History (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 596.

²Gilman M. Ostrander, Profile History of the United States (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 424.

Roosevelt's major group of followers, the New Dealers, caused Truman considerable trouble in the campaign of 1948. This group, in collaboration with other liberals, was partially responsible for the "draft Eisenhower" movement, the "Dixiecrat revolt," and the Progressive split in the pre-convention period and convention days of 1948. Their attitude, whether intentional or not, was one of scorn for Truman when he assumed the Presidency. To their way of thinking, no one could take the place of Franklin D. Roosevelt, least of all a man as "average" as Harry S. Truman. They complained:

Now, if you can get in to see Truman at all you have a feeling that he's just another government official in just another government office. There's no dazzle, no inspiration. Just apathy. You will notice that people around Washington still mean Roosevelt when they say 'the President;' they refer to the present White House occupant as 'Mr. Truman.'³

Shortly after Truman became President, he reacted to the attitude of Roosevelt's loyal supporters by firing many of them. Although he supported many policies of the New Deal, bad feelings intensified and helped to explain the

³"The Cooling of the South's Anti-Truman Revolt," United States News and World Report, XXIV (May 21, 1948), 24; see Ernest K. Lindley, "Democrats and Desperation," Newsweek, XXXI (April 5, 1948), 19; and Jack Redding, Inside the Democratic Party (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), p. 191.

disaffection of many of these liberals even after the Democratic Convention in 1948.⁴

Yet Truman's foremost problem when he assumed the office of President of the United States had to do with his public image. In many ways he was the antithesis of Roosevelt, who would have cast a large shadow over any successor. In this case, the shadow was even deeper and darker because of the contrast between Roosevelt and Truman. The public's attitude was expressed: "President Harry Truman is not Franklin Roosevelt, but he's the only President we have."⁵

Early in Truman's first term of office, an ironical change in public opinion became obvious. His popularity at one time, according to a Gallup poll, climbed to an eighty-seven per cent approval rating. Primarily, three reasons accounted for this initial popular acceptance. First, the public saw Truman as "one of the people." In this sense, Truman brought the office of the Presidency closer to the people. Second, Truman took office in an unpretentious way. He promised to continue the policies of his predecessor and not to "rock the boat." The most important

⁴"Mutineers and the Firm Hand," Newsweek, XXXII (July 26, 1948), 18.

⁵"The Democrats Have to be Progressive," New Republic, CXIV (February 11, 1946), 188.

reason, however, was that both leading political parties-- out of respect for Roosevelt and because they realized the handicaps his successor would have--paused to give the new man time to establish himself in office. Finally, the new President was able to get along with Congress better than Roosevelt had. For this reason, Truman's first few months in office gave the impression to most observers of being successful ones.⁶

The general acceptance of Truman did not last long. Truman's homespun personality did not necessarily qualify him for leading the nation.

. . .the plain people still liked Harry Truman as a plain man, but he was not a President who inspired their high confidence and enthusiastic admiration. . . .A great many of the U. S. people felt sorry for him.⁷

The words honest and efficient used to describe Truman when he entered office were later changed to bungling and inefficient. People began to believe that because of his humble attitude he was not qualified for the office of President. There were, however, more substantial reasons for belief that Truman was not qualified

⁶Ernest K. Lindley, "Mr. Truman Under Fire," Newsweek, XXIII (February 25, 1946), 30.

⁷"After One Year," Time, XLVI (April 15, 1946), 19.

to be President. He began his political career at the age of thirty-eight under the tutelage of Tom Pendergrast of Kansas City. From his post as county judge, he was promoted by the party to the Senate where he acquired the reputation of being a "yes man" in Congress. On ninety per cent of all legislation he voted straight New Deal. The one exception to his uncreative career as Senator was his efficiency in handling what came to be known as the Truman Committee.⁸ Rather by accident, he was elected to the Vice Presidency. He was a compromise candidate who, because he was a Southerner and because of his voting record in the Senate (where he had managed to stay in the background and follow), was considered harmless. As President, a totally new, active leadership was expected. He could not make the switch effectively. At this time ". . . he (Truman) followed events; he did not lead them."⁹

Unqualified for the office himself, Truman appointed old friends to high places in the government when he became

⁸A Senate committee of which Truman was chairman which performed valuable service during World War II by investigating corruption in government war contracts.

⁹Harold J. Laski, "The American Political Scene," Nation, CLXIII (November 16, 1946), 550; Peter R. Levin, Seven by Chance: The Accidental Presidents (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Company, 1948), pp. 280-286; and Robert S. Allen and William W. Shannon, The Truman Merry-go-round (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1950), pp. 18-19.

President. Many of these men were as unqualified for their respective offices as Truman was for his. The term "crony" with all its derisive connotation became a popular way to describe the Truman appointees. Truman himself complained of the incompetency of many of his appointees, but because of loyalty to them he would not fire them.

. . . a man any less stubbornly loyal to his cronies might have decided that some friends were more trouble than they were worth. This was one decision that Harry Truman seemed unwilling to face.¹⁰

The result was confusion in the Government. After a short time in office, Truman tried to enact changes in the Chief Executive office. He wanted to establish a personal rapport with Congress. His plan included a "hands off" policy to permit the nation's legislators more freedom. The idea was a good one in theory, but was a failure in application. What the nation wanted was a man who could implement his ideas. What they were getting was a genial, hardworking man who had yet to become a leader others would follow.¹¹

¹⁰ "A Little More Hectic," Time, XLIV (February 18, 1946), 17.

¹¹ Avery Craven and Walter Johnson, The United States: Experiment in Democracy (second edition; New York: Ginn and Company, 1962), p. 590.

Harold Laski, leader of the British Labor Party at this time, and a visitor to the United States in 1946, described the nation under Truman's leadership:

To the foreign observer of the American scene, the outstanding characteristic of the landscape is the absence of effective leadership. There is nowhere any clear picture of direction. There is a confused babble of noises from which emerges no decisive note. The White House may have the best of intentions, but Americans watch it rather to see the mistakes it will make than to hope for the guidance it might offer.¹²

Laski also criticized the President's relaxed attitude toward his job, his penchant for selecting friends for office and his obvious inexperience. Laski's summary was a cutting one: "President Truman is a weak President because he has not the special kind of resolution which makes a strong President."¹³

The overall picture one gets of Truman at this time is that of a good-natured, muddling President incapable of doing his job. This image carried over to the campaign of 1948; however, the picture was distorted. Truman probably saw himself more accurately than the pollsters did when, on the slip of his popularity rating to forty-eight per cent in April of 1947, he said: "I never should have been

¹²Laski, op. cit., 548.

¹³Ibid.

eighty-seven and I never should have been thirty-two. But forty-eight isn't far off."¹⁴ Truman was not yet an experienced hand at leading the nation, but he was far from the incompetent bungler he was pictured as in 1947.

Several factors contributed to the distortion of the Truman picture. Truman's inexperience, coupled with his own attitude, emphasized his inadequacies. In a speech to the people of Independence, Missouri, shortly after his accidental rise to the Presidency, he said: "I shall attempt . . . to meet your expectations, but don't expect too much of me."¹⁵

Truman's image always suffered when contrasted with Franklin Roosevelt who made Truman, in 1946, look like a much poorer President than he was. Truman keenly felt his Presidential responsibility and was sensitive to critical comparisons between himself and his predecessor. The result was a tension-ridden government that was expending itself in petty quarreling, instead of focusing on the business of running a nation.¹⁶

¹⁴"Republican Honeymoon is Over," Fortune, XXXV (April, 1947), 79.

¹⁵"President After 52 Weeks, A Surer Man," Newsweek, XXVII (April 15, 1946), 26.

¹⁶Frank Friedel, America in the Twentieth Century (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), pp. 484, 491-493.

The office of Chief Executive itself was undergoing subtle changes at the time Truman was President. The experienced politicians, as well as the average person, had held the office of the Presidency in awe during Roosevelt's years in office. Truman, however, worked toward bringing the office of President of the United States down to the people's level. Truman succeeded. In fact, he did the job to his own detriment. Much of Roosevelt's power had been dependent on maintaining a respectable distance between himself and the people. Legislators, government officials, and the common man respected Roosevelt and listened when he spoke. Truman lost this respect when he decreased the aesthetic distance between the office of President and the level of the common man.¹⁷

Despite these distortions in the image Truman projected, the Democratic Party entered the Congressional election of 1946 disorganized and with no recognized leader. The liberal factor of the party looked back to the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and mourned that there was now no guiding influence in the White House. Truman had fired several of their number and seemed conservative in comparison with their late, beloved leader.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Allen and Shannon, op. cit., p. 25.

The Republicans took advantage of the Democratic split, between the pro-Trumans and pro-Roosevelts, and conducted an effective campaign. Their slogan, coined by a New England businessman, was "Had Enough? Vote Republican!" The people had "had enough." They were ready for a change. The result was an overwhelming victory for the Republicans.¹⁹

Ordinarily, the party in power experiences some slump in midterm elections, but rarely has a political party been so overwhelmingly repudiated at the polls as were the Democrats in 1946. They had been in power for fourteen years. The average United States' citizen was war weary and took this opportunity to vote against the political party that had been in power during the war years. Truman and the Democratic Party were blamed for such things as labor strikes, inflation, and poor diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia.²⁰ Added to the public discontent was the fact that the Democrats were fighting among themselves and did not conduct an effective campaign in 1946.

¹⁹ Hugh A. Bone, American Politics and the Party System (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 260; and Leland Baldwin, The Stream of American History (New York: American Book Co., 1957), pp. 736-737.

²⁰ Cabell Phillips, The Truman Presidency (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 160.

The Republican victory in 1946 suggested that the Republicans were about to become the party in power. The Republican-dominated Congress could establish national policy during the next two years and have only token opposition. Barring unforeseen developments, a Republican would be elected President of the United States.²¹ Few people, Democrats or Republicans, doubted that the party switch was probable.

The result of the Congressional elections of 1946 was not, however, the disaster for the Democratic Party that many thought it was. Because he had felt the responsibility for continuing to implement Roosevelt's New Deal programs (which were not his own), almost everything Truman attempted to do was a dim carbon copy of his predecessor. The party defeat in 1946 was, to him, a repudiation of New Deal policies. After the defeat, he felt that he was relieved of the responsibility of continuing FDR's version of the New Deal. Truman was forced to institute his own program. For the first time since entering office, Truman was able to take the offensive.²² And, as he became more aggressive about

²¹"Republicans Start a New Political Era," Life, XXI (November 15, 1946), 31.

²²Allen and Shannon, op. cit., p. 30.

leading, the Truman victory of 1948 began to materialize. In late 1947 he initiated final tactics that were to carry him to victory.

Clark Clifford, closest of Truman's advisors, outlined in November, 1947, what the new Truman emphasis should be. Clifford, with unusual political acumen, predicted that Thomas Dewey would be Truman's opponent in the 1948 Presidential election, and that Henry Wallace would run on a third party ticket. Clifford erroneously calculated the strength of the Dixiecrat revolt, but was accurate in his other predictions. He advised Truman to give top priority in his political strategy to the farmers, to labor groups, to Negroes, and to Jews. Truman should court the common people because of his identity with them.²³

Truman took the experts' advice under strong consideration, but he initiated some caution of his own. Truman's image began to change. Examples are abundant. He vetoed the Taft-Hartley bill.²⁴ He advocated and implemented a strong stand on civil rights by the Democratic Party. He spoke

²³Phillips, op. cit., pp. 197-199.

²⁴The Taft-Hartley bill was introduced by Congress for two primary reasons. First, it was introduced to redress the balance of bargaining between labor and management by defining unfair labor practices for union as well as employees. Secondly, it was to protect the individual workers from arbitrary control of labor leaders.

in favor of price controls. He pacified the Jews by a quick recognition of the new nation of Israel. It is significant that all of these actions, except the Palestinian question, became major issues in 1948. His strong stand on civil rights precipitated the Dixiecrat revolt, but gained votes from Negroes and Independents. His stand on price controls influenced many farmers, who would not otherwise have done so, to cast their votes for Truman.²⁵

The Truman-Clifford strategy went almost undetected by the professional pollsters and the general public, who still evaluated Truman an ineffective President, the Democratic Party a decadent structure, and the chances of a Democrat's being elected to the Presidency in 1948 as practically nil.²⁶

True to Clark Clifford's prediction, however, the Republicans in 1948 nominated Thomas Dewey as their Presidential candidate. Since the early 1940's, Dewey's personality traits had been emphasized by the press.²⁷ Dewey had a cold personality, magnified by bad relations with newsmen. He

²⁵Allen and Shannon, loc. cit.

²⁶Rexford Tugwell, How They Became President (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), pp. 436-437.

²⁷Richard H. Rovere, "Dewey: the Man in the Blue Serge Suit," Harpers Magazine, CLXXXVIII (May, 1944), 482.

was impatient with reporters and attempted to use them rather than to woo them. As a result of his impoliteness, newspapermen castigated him in print at every opportunity. They called him "conceited," "superficial," "unnaturally ambitious." They concluded that he was not qualified to become President of the United States.²⁸

In the Presidential campaign of 1944 (in which Dewey ran against Franklin Roosevelt), the personality traits of Dewey had been similarly attacked. At that time, one newsman said, ". . .not since Charles Evans Hughes has a nominee crossed America and left such a chill behind him."²⁹ Another, just as caustically, said, ". . .we just don't like Dewey. This is about our worst charge. He is a cold fish."³⁰

Several critics complained of Dewey's cliches like "We shall have our freedom so long as we are are free."³¹

²⁸Oswald Villiard, "Our Lack of Leadership," Christian Century, LIX (September 25, 1942), 1083-4; see "Thomas E. Dewey: The Man and His Record," New Republic, CXI (September 25, 1944), 387, 389; I. F. Stone, "Thomas E. Dewey: Close-up of a Candidate," Nation, CLVIII (May 20, 1944), 586; and Rovere, op. cit., 484.

²⁹"Dewey Climaxes His Tour in Los Angeles," Life, XVII (October 2, 1944), 35.

³⁰"We Take Our Stand," New Republic, CXI (October 23, 1944), 530.

³¹Rovere, op. cit., 482.

Stanley Walker, author of an obviously partisan book on the life of Dewey, did not attempt to refute the evaluations of Dewey's personality, but rather emphasized Dewey's efficiency as an off-setting quality for his poor personality.³²

Even as early as 1943, the Dewey forces had begun to revamp their leader's public image. They needed to shift the attention from Dewey's cold personality. Dewey himself relaxed and attempted to establish some rapport with the press. His best selling point was his record as District Attorney of New York. This was emphasized. He was billed as one of the most successful prosecutors in New York history.³³ He was projected as a successful governor.

In three years as Governor (1943-45) he had built up New York's cash surplus to a staggering \$500 million. In the election of 1946, Tom Dewey was re-elected by a whopping margin of 650,000.³⁴

He was called ". . . a quick, inquisitive, and forceful. . . man as ever lived."³⁵

³²Ernest K. Lindley, "Dewey, F. D. R., and the Spoken Word," Newsweek, XXIV (July 10, 1944), 40.

³³Irving Stone, They Also Ran (New York: Pyramid Books, 1943), pp. 417-418.

³⁴Phillips, loc. cit.

³⁵Raymond Moley, "Dewey of New York," Newsweek, XXI (March 29, 1943), 80.

His youth, and comparatively good showing against Roosevelt in 1944 were alluded to as worthy. His supporters emphasized that:

. . .with his moderate reforms and his conservative financial policy, Thomas E. Dewey has managed to impress the country's voters as a liberal, but not too liberal, governor, a sound but not too conservative Republican.³⁶

By late 1947, Truman was looking worse, being compared with both Dewey and Roosevelt. Roosevelt was brilliant. Dewey was efficient. Truman was average.

The Wallace candidacy posed a serious threat to Truman's re-election. Wallace appealed to disillusioned New Dealers and other liberals and, in the early weeks of 1948, many of this group announced that they were supporting the Progressive Party. Many columnists and political experts predicted that Wallace would cost Truman the electoral votes of important states such as New York, Illinois, and California.

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"Election: Why Dewey Deserves the Vote," Life, XVII (October 6, 1944), 34; see "GOP Jockeyings, It's Just Dewey vs. Wilkie," Newsweek, XXIII (January 24, 1944), 39; R. L. Buell, "Should Liberals Vote For Dewey?" Life, XVII (October 30, 1944), 60; Irving Stone, op. cit., p. 451; and "Thomas Dewey Sticks to His Albany Knitting," Life, XVI (March 20, 1944), 95.

CHAPTER III

THE CAMPAIGN

The Presidential campaign of 1948 started on December 29, 1947 in Chicago. Henry Wallace, in an emotional, nationwide broadcast, announced that he would be the Progressive Party's nominee for President of the United States. He stated in his announcement address that the two major political parties were tired and old--the Republican Party being "hopeless" and the Democrats being saddled with a leader who was driving the United States nearer to war with Russia.¹

The Wallace candidacy posed a serious threat to Truman's re-election. Wallace appealed to disillusioned New Dealers and other liberals; and, in the early weeks of 1948, many of this group announced that they were supporting the Progressive Party. Many columnists and political experts predicted that Wallace would cost Truman the electoral votes of important states such as New York, Illinois, and California.

¹Cabell Phillips, The Truman Presidency (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 201; and Samuel Eliot Morrison, The Oxford History of the American People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 1049.

However, as the campaign progressed, the influence of the Wallace revolt was found to be less than originally supposed. Although Henry Wallace was not a Communist, he would not disavow Communist support. However, it was soon discovered that many of the people holding influential positions in the Progressive Party were Communists. This Communist infiltration cost Wallace many liberal votes. As a result, when the final vote was counted, only a little over a million people had voted for Wallace.²

The main problem that the Progressive Party posed to the Democrats throughout the campaign was that the Democrats did not know whether Wallace would take enough votes away from Truman to give the victory to Dewey. This caused Truman to be undecided as to whether he should concentrate verbal ammunition on Wallace or leave him alone. He finally decided on the latter, which proved to be successful.³

In addition to the Wallace defection, the Democrats also had to deal with what came to be known as the Dixiecrat

²Charles A. Madison, Leaders and Liberals in 20th Century America (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 445-446; Rexford G. Tugwell, How They Became President (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), p. 436; "Mounting Troubles That can Spell Defeat for Truman," United States News and World Report, XXXII (March 12, 1948), 34; and Eric Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny (second edition; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 322-325.

³Phillips, op. cit., p. 205.

revolt. Truman had consistently provoked Southern Democrats since 1945 with his strong stand in favor of civil rights. However, until 1948, Truman had only talked about what should be done about discrimination against the Negro. In February, Truman issued a civil rights message asking for legislation to end ". . . segregation and discrimination in the use of transportation facilities by both public officers and the employees of private companies throughout the country."⁴

Southern reaction to Truman's message was quick and decisive. A six-man delegation headed by Strom Thurmond, later to be nominated for President on the States Rights ticket, went to Washington to confer with Democratic leaders about the position of the party on the Negro. Thurmond asked Howard McGrath if he would use his position as National Chairman of the Democratic Party to influence the President to soften his stand on the civil rights issue. McGrath declined to do so and the Southern delegation went home completely defeated.⁵

⁴ Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope (Vol. II of Memoirs. 2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 181; Thomas Bonner, Our Recent Past (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 347; and V. O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 330.

⁵ Phillips, op. cit., p. 207; Jack Redding, Inside the Democratic Party (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), p. 192; and "The Victorious Rebellion of Harry S. Truman," Newsweek, XXXII (November 8, 1948), 3.

Frustrated because of their inability to achieve the desired results, Southern leaders planned a meeting of delegates in Jackson on May 10, 1948, to discuss their strategy for the coming campaign. Delegates from only seven Southern states attended, and results of the meeting were far from satisfactory to many ardent segregationist leaders. However, this meeting was a step toward the organization that was to take away thirty-eight electoral votes from the Democrats on election day.⁶

Nation-wide reaction to the Truman stand on civil rights was generally unfavorable. David Lawrence thought:

Strong conservative support had already been given to Mr. Truman from the Democratic South and there was available to him a substantial conservative strength of a liberal kind in the North among Independent voters. . . .Mr. Truman, on the other hand, forfeited the respect of the South by a message on 'civil rights'. . . .Politically, it was a mistake for Mr. Truman to try to curry favor with a 'left wing' minority on this issue. For, by doing so, Mr. Truman lost the South. . . .⁷

At the Democratic Convention, held early in July, the problem came up again. Any chance for compromise or mollification was ended when liberals--headed by Hubert Humphrey, mayor of Minneapolis--held out for the adoption of a strong

⁶Phillips, op. cit., p. 208.

⁷David Lawrence, "Poor Mr. Truman!" United States News and World Report, XXIV (April 9, 1948), 37.

civil rights plank in the Democratic platform. The liberals won a trial vote on the issue and a portion of the Southern delegation walked out.⁸

Democratic platforms since Roosevelt first ran for President in 1932 had stated that the Democratic Party believed in equal rights for Negro and white. The difference between 1932 and 1948 was that Truman actually intended to enforce the civil rights plank in the Democratic platform. After the Southern delegates had walked out of the convention, one reporter said to Strom Thurmond: "President Truman is only following the platform that Roosevelt advocated." "I agree," Thurmond replied, "but Truman really means it."⁹

The most damaging blow to Truman's re-election plans came from the political bosses and leading liberals in his own party. After a Gallup poll in May which stated that the Truman popularity had dropped to thirty-six per cent, many of the leaders in the Democratic Party reasoned that with Truman as their nominee it would be impossible for the Democratic Party to win the Presidential election in 1948. They frantically began to search for another man to lead the party. The most obvious choice was General Dwight D. Eisenhower,

⁸Redding, loc. cit.; and Phillips, op. cit., p. 219.

⁹Truman, op. cit., p. 183.

America's most idolized war hero. Jake Arvey, Jewish political boss of Chicago, instigating the Eisenhower move, said, "Come election time. . .I will vote for. . .a man who can be elected. I hope General Eisenhower becomes available."¹⁰

The "draft Eisenhower" movement grew stronger despite the fact that people did not know what Eisenhower stood for. They only knew that they wanted a popular figure to replace Truman. Although Eisenhower had never taken an active part in politics, and therefore knew little about such problems as civil rights, labor, and other issues, many party leaders were willing to turn the reins of the party over to this political novice because of his popularity.

A sizable cross section of the Democratic Party indicated that they also would be in favor of a ticket led by Eisenhower. Among Ike's supporters were Elliott and James Roosevelt, sons of the former President; Mayor Frank Hague of Jersey City; Leon Henderson, head of Americans for Democratic Action; Hugh Mitchell, Democratic leader in the state of Washington; Senator Claude Pepper of Florida; Senator Richard Russell of Georgia; Governor A. B. (Happy) Chandler of Kentucky; Paul Douglas, Illinois candidate for Senator; John Bailey, State Chairman of Connecticut; Governor Jim Nance

¹⁰"The Black and White Beans," Time, LI (May 3, 1948), 21; and "Panic," Time, LI (April 5, 1948), 22.

McCord of Tennessee; Mayor Edward Kelly of Chicago; Mayor William O'Dwyer of New York; Senators Lester Hill and John Sparkman of Alabama; Hubert Humphrey, mayor of Minneapolis; Walter Reuther of the CIO; Chester Bowles and Wilson Wyatt, who were also leaders in Americans for Democratic Action.¹¹

The consensus of political opinion was that no one except for Eisenhower would have a chance to retain the Presidency for the Democrats. Many felt that for the sake of Senatorial, Congressional, and Gubernatorial candidates who would lose votes if Truman ran, the President should step down and let General Eisenhower or some strong candidate take over. One correspondent's remarks represented party feeling:

President Truman cannot avoid being aware of the open opposition to his renomination. It is doubtful, however, whether he realizes that almost nobody in his party really wants him to run again. . . . This is not because they think he is a weak candidate. He lacks popular appeal, skill as a political manager, and force as a leader.¹²

During the "draft Eisenhower" movement, General Eisenhower maintained silence. Claude Pepper, Senator from

¹¹"Democrats and Desperation," Newsweek, XXXII (April 5, 1948), 19; Redding, op. cit., p. 162; Phillips, op. cit., pp. 210-211; and Herbert Agar, The Price of Power (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 81.

¹²Ernest K. Lindley, "Advice to the Democrats," Newsweek, XXXII (July 12, 1948), 27.

Florida, wired the general two days before the Democratic Convention and stated that the Democrats planned to nominate Eisenhower with or without his approval. Eisenhower stated: "I would refuse to accept the nomination under any conditions, terms, or premises."¹³ This squelched the "draft Eisenhower" movement and assured Truman of the nomination in 1948.

Despite the dismal outlook in the preconvention days of the campaign of 1948 and some opposition, Truman was convinced that the people were still for him. He set out to prove where the public's sympathies lay by taking a "non-political" tour across the nation in April of 1948. Truman's stated purpose for the trip was to receive an honorary degree from the University of California at Berkeley. The actual purpose of the jaunt was to give Truman a chance to speak extemporaneously to the people of America and to test the peoples' reaction to the Truman personality. Most of his speeches were given from the rear platform of a train in such places as Pocatello, Idaho; Eugene, Oregon; Gary, Indiana; and Laramie, Wyoming. The highlight of the tour came when Truman reached Los Angeles. Crowds estimated at more than a million people jammed the parade route to catch a glimpse of the President. Although virtually ignored by

¹³Phillips, op. cit., p. 211.

most political observers, the people's reaction helped convince Truman that he should run for re-election, and set a precedent for the famous "Give 'em Hell" campaigning by Truman in the latter part of the 1948 campaign. Senator Robert Taft's complaint about Truman's "whistle stop" campaign actually helped Truman. Not only was a new political term coined, but Taft incited the ire of cities across the United States who were not overjoyed at having their cities called "whistle stops."¹⁴

Shortly after Truman returned from his "non-political" tour, the national political conventions began. The Republicans held their convention first at Philadelphia in June. The three leading candidates were Robert A. Taft, Harold Stassen, and Thomas E. Dewey. Taft had the disadvantage of being a leader in Senate at a time when the Republicans were trying to disassociate themselves from the record of the Eightieth Congress. Stassen had been a sensation in the early Presidential primaries but had incurred the wrath of the Republican "Old Guard" by his unconventional tactics--such as entering the Ohio primary. Ohio was the home state of Senator Taft. The only remaining alternative was Thomas E. Dewey. Dewey was not very well liked, but his political

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 211, 213-216.

record was good. Earl Warren, popular governor of California, was nominated as Dewey's running mate.¹⁵

The Democrats moved into Philadelphia in July to hold their convention. One commentator described them as excitable, idealistic, and reckless when in convention assembly. He said that they would rather fight among themselves than with the enemy. The 1948 convention was a unique one. The incumbent candidate for President was re-nominated, but with extreme reluctance. The atmosphere of the whole meeting was that of gloomy resignation. The delegates were resigned to the unpleasant task of re-nominating a Presidential candidate who they felt could not possibly win. Despite the attempts of the Southerners, the liberals, the Wallacites, and a gathering generally apathetic toward Truman, he won the re-nomination on Wednesday, July 14. Truman got 948 votes, while Richard Russell received the entire Southern vote of 263. Alben Barkley was nominated as the Democratic Vice Presidential candidate.¹⁶

¹⁵Hugh Bone, American Politics and the Party System (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 261; and Harvey Wish, Contemporary America: The National Scene Since 1900 (fourth edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 662-663.

¹⁶D. W. Brogan, Politics in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 214; Ernest K. Lindley, "Democratic Low Ebb," Newsweek, XXXII (July 9, 1948), 21; and Phillips, op. cit., p. 221.

The high point of the Democratic Convention came on the last day. Knowing that the convention was tired and their spirits low, at 2:00 in the morning Truman made what has come to be one of the most famous acceptance speeches in political history:

Senator Barkley and I will win this election and make the Republicans like it, dont you forget that. . . .Never in the world were the farmers. . . . as prosperous (as now). . . .and if they don't do their duty by the Democratic Party they're the most ungrateful people in the world. . . .And I'll say to labor just what I've said to the farmer.¹⁷

He criticized the Eightieth Congress and the Republican platform. ". . .They promised to do in that platform a lot of things I've been asking them to do and that they've refused to do when they had the power." The next point of the speech was the surprising one--i.e.

. . .On the twenty-sixth day of July, which out in Missouri they call 'Turnip Day,' I'm going to call Congress back. . . .What that worst 80th Congress does in its special session will be the test.¹⁹

The recalling into session of the Eightieth Congress proved to be a master stroke of political maneuvering. The response of the tired delegates at the Democratic Convention was tremendous. The Democratic Party, almost politically dead, lived and breathed again. (Truman later admitted that

¹⁷"Line Squall," Time, LIII (July 26, 1948), 14.

¹⁸Ibid.

he knew that Congress could not pass many bills in a fifteen-day special session. He confessed that his idea of a special session was a strictly political and partisan move calculated to embarrass the Republicans). Editorials across the nation roundly denounced the recall, but it accomplished its purpose. "Turnip Day" focused the eyes of the nation on the Republican "do nothing" Congress and set the stage for Truman's whole campaign.¹⁹

Even more important in Truman's campaign strategy than his blasts at the Eightieth Congress was the personality of Harry Truman. As far back as 1947 a wise political observer realized that:

The . . . biggest Republican problem is named Harry Truman. This is a brand-new problem, so new that some Republicans have not even heard of it as a problem.

Most Americans, in the days following the Republican triumph last fall would have laughed at the thought that Mr. Truman could win the Presidency in 1948. Those who do not follow politics closely are probably of this mind now. But the keenest G. O. P. leaders believe today, that, given a not impossible set of circumstances, Harry Truman may be a hard man to beat; and though they say this privately, they say it in deepest sincerity.²⁰

¹⁹ Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-223; and Dexter Perkins and Glyndon G. Van Deusen, The American Democracy: Its Rise to Power (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), pp. 597-598.

²⁰ "Republicans Honeymoon is Over," Fortune, XXXV (April, 1947), 77.

Harry Truman sought to overcome a set of supposedly impossible obstacles, with a campaign fitted around his personality. Because he was facing defeat and had only a decadent Democratic organization, which had by and large already given up, Truman had no choice but to wage a fierce campaign. He stayed on the offensive at all times, carrying the fight to the Republicans in every way possible, capitalizing on mistakes and making political capital in any way possible.²¹

Many ridiculed Truman's conducting the "whistle stop" type of campaign. Truman traveled 22,000 miles to tell the country what he believed in and why the people should not vote Republican. The trips were not dignified or organized, but proved very effective. "He personally carried his story to the people."²²

Truman's campaign began officially in Detroit on Labor Day. In the city of labor, Truman attacked the Republicans' stand on labor, particularly their veto of the Taft-Hartley

²¹"Long Shot That Won't Give Up," Newsweek, XXXII (October 11, 1948), 26; and John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 806-807.

²²W. McMillen, "Miracle of 1948," Vital Speeches XV (January 1, 1949), 182.

Act. Truman gave the impression that if Dewey were elected President the labor cause would suffer a severe blow.²³

Traveling into Iowa, farming country, Truman described the Republicans as primarily concerned with big business and accused the Republicans of betraying the American farmer. He cited the fact that the farmers had no place to store their grain and thus were forced to sell their grain below the support price because they had no place to store it. For this, they could thank the same Republican Congress.²⁴

So it went across the country. At the end of the first ten-day jaunt across the country, Mr. Truman's advisors believed that they had made some progress. They also thought Truman had set a background for strategy that would pay off later. They felt that Truman had connected Dewey sufficiently with the troubles of the Eightieth Congress. They also felt that sooner or later Dewey would have to reply to the Truman charges and that this would be to the advantage of the Democrats.²⁵

And so the Truman cavalcade went rocketing up and down the land, laying down a barrage of political

²³Phillips, op. cit., p. 232.

²⁴Ibid., p. 236.

²⁵News item in the New York Times, October 3, 1948.

hyperbole, accusation and ridicule. Much of it was nonsense and some of it was shameful, but there was a seed of truth in most of what he said and an element of low-keyed heroics in the way he said it.²⁶

Truman even intensified his attacks on Dewey and the Republicans. In Wilmington, Delaware, on October 6, Truman exclaimed:

Herbert Hoover once ran on this slogan: 'Two cars in every garage.' Apparently the Republican candidate this year is running on the slogan: 'Two families in every garage.'²⁷

In Philadelphia on the same day, he attacked Dewey's unity theme: "We believe in the unity of free men. We believe in the unity of great causes. We don't believe in the unity of slaves or the unity of sheep being led to slaughter."²⁸ At Rochester on October 8, Truman attacked the Republican Party: "The leopard has not changed his spots--he has merely hired some public relations experts."²⁹ In St. Paul Truman attacked the "me too" attitude of the Republicans: ". . .The American people should consider the risk of entrusting their destiny to recent converts who come along and say, 'Me too,

²⁶Phillips, op. cit., p. 241.

²⁷"By Harry S. Truman: Campaign Barbs That Won The Votes. . .," Newsweek, XXXII (November 8, 1948), 4.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

but I can do better.'"³⁰ At Johnston, Pennsylvania, Truman taunted the Republicans: "GOP these days means just one thing: 'Grand Old Platitude.'"³¹

Truman continued his attack on the campaign tactics of the Republicans in Pittsburg on October 23: "This soft talk and double talk. . .proceeds upon the assumption that you can fool the people--or enough of them--all the time."³² Finally, in Brooklyn on October 29, an optimistic Truman said: "I have good news for you. We have the Republicans on the run. . . .We are going to win."³³

The zenith in Truman's campaign speeches was reached in his last one which was broadcast to the nation from St. Louis, Missouri on October 29. In it, he emphasized his own achievements. He referred to his bringing the war to a successful conclusion, and his support of the founding of the United Nations. He then stressed that the major asset of the Democratic Party was that it was a peoples' party. He pointed to New Deal reforms which were enacted for the

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5; and Leland Baldwin and Robert Keeley, The American Nation (third edition; New York: American Book Company, 1965), p. 748.

³¹ "Campaign Barbs That Won the Votes. . . ," op. cit., 5.

³² Ibid.

³³ President Truman's St. Louis Address, New York Times, October 29, 1948.

benefit of the common man as proof. Again, as in other speeches prior to this one, Truman appealed to the farmer: "And I'll say to you that any farmer who votes against his own interests, that is, who votes the Republican ticket ought to have his head examined."³⁴

In the same speech he spoke of the Republican stand on labor, specifically the Taft-Hartley Act. The apathetic labor turnout at the polls in 1946 was responsible for the passage of the Taft-Hartley. If labor did not get behind the Democratic ticket in 1948, the same thing could happen again.³⁵

Warming to his task, Truman attacked Thomas Dewey, his opponent, and the Eightieth Congress, also his opponent.

Of all the fake campaigns this is the tops as far as the Republican candidate for President is concerned. He's been following me up and down the country making speeches about home and mother and unity and efficiency and things of that kind.³⁶

Then, switching to give equal attack to his other opponent, he said: "It has worked for the lobby, the worst lobby outfit that there's ever been in the history of the United States."³⁷

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

At the end of the speech, he described the great reception he had received in every city in which he had visited:

People are waking up, the tide's beginning to roll, and I'm here to tell you that if you do your duty as citizens of the greatest republic the sun has ever shone on, we'll have a Government that'll be for your interests, that'll be for peace in the world, and for the welfare of all the people and not just a few.³⁸

Truman's acid oratory had incisively exposed the weaknesses of his opponent and his ability to identify with "the people."³⁹

The tactics of Thomas Dewey were exactly the opposite of Truman's. He decided not to "rock the boat." He said nothing controversial, and his speeches were full of platitudes. The core theme of Dewey's speeches was unity, a sufficiently safe theme:

From the Atlantic to the Pacific and back again. . . Dewey racked up 16,000 miles of campaigning, but the speech delivered at each stop carried the same burden: 'We are entered upon a campaign to unite America. We are going to move forward to a new unity.'⁴⁰

A classic example of a Dewey speech was given early in October at Salt Lake City. He opened with a platitude: "We

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Louis B. Wright and others, The Democratic Experience (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1963), p. 435.

will wage peace, we will wage peace with all the vigor and the imagination and the skill with which we waged war."⁴¹ After this, he promised to: (1) support the United Nations; (2) aid freedom-loving people everywhere; (3) encourage the European nations to unite; (4) remain strong and get stronger; (5) continue to be a flourishing and vigorous nation; and, (7) express in the American foreign policy the "ideals, traditions, and aspirations of the American people."⁴²

As Dewey entered the last week of the campaign, he too was extremely confident of winning. On a last campaign trip to the East he campaigned more for Republican Senators, Congressmen, and Governors than for himself. Returning from that last trip, he stayed at home for the final week. He was silent and sure of victory.⁴³

Immediately before the election, Dewey declared that the paramount issue of the campaign was whether the United States would be a strong, united nation able to meet "the challenge of a dangerous world."⁴⁴ Above all other objectives

⁴¹Governor Dewey's Salt Lake City Speech, New York Times, October 1, 1948.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³"Coasting," Newsweek, XXXII (November 1, 1948), 19.

⁴⁴Dewey's Speech on the Eve of Election, New York Times, November 1, 1948.

was the building of "a lasting peace in the world upon the work of justice and decency."⁴⁵ Dewey closed his campaign as he had begun it--with a "give 'em unity" speech.

Dewey was given, throughout his campaign, the overwhelming support of the newspapers across the nation. Even from Truman's home state of Missouri, three major newspapers, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the St. Louis Times, and the St. Joseph News-Press (all of which favored Roosevelt in 1944), supported Dewey in 1948. The New York Times, generally conceded to be the nation's leading newspaper, came out for Dewey. The New York Post decided that Truman's election was undesirable. Opinions similar to this existed across the nation. Many Southern journals were expected to oppose Truman. A few went even further and supported Dewey. "In contrast to the President's ill fortunes, Dewey had not suffered a single newspaper defection."⁴⁶

Most of the papers supported Dewey reluctantly, professing to believe that Truman could not measure up to the rigorous demands of being an effective President. One consolation for Truman, however, was that the President made the headlines with his sensational blasts at Dewey and the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Seldom an Encouraging Word," Newsweek, XXXII (November 1, 1948), 11.

Republican Party. Dewey, on the other hand, proceeded in his calm campaign, notable for its lack of headline material.⁴⁷

Not only did Truman have newspaper troubles throughout the campaign, but he also lacked money to finance his campaign. The regular Southern contributors, labor unions, wealthy New Dealers, Hollywood backers, and wealthy individuals were reluctant to give money to a controversial, if not lost, cause.⁴⁸

Examples of Democratic financial difficulties in 1948 are many. On one occasion, \$100,000 was needed to pay NBC and CBS for network time. The deadline came and the party treasury contained only \$500. The Democrats gave Warwick and Legler, a New York agency, a check for \$100,000 late Saturday. In turn, Warwick and Legler gave their check to the television networks too late to be deposited on Saturday. By Monday, the Democrats had raised the \$100,000. At one time the Truman whistle-stop campaign ran out of money in Oklahoma City. Several rich oilmen had to be called on to

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ernest Lindley, "Democratic Low Ebb," op. cit., 21; and Dumas Malone and Basil Rauch, American and World Leadership (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), VI, 103.

keep the "Truman express" going. On another occasion, Truman was cut off the air by the television networks because no money was available to pay for overtime.⁴⁹

Added to the discouraging factors discussed was the fact that the three public opinion polls unanimously predicted that Truman could not possibly be re-elected.⁵⁰ The May tabulation has already been discussed. At that time, according to Gallup, only thirty-six per cent of the voters were for Truman.⁵¹

In April, Newsweek had conducted a less than scientific survey of the Senate. Thirteen senators were committed against Truman, twenty-six more were uncommitted, and only six were definitely for him.⁵² Several magazines discounted future issues and referred to the Governor of New York as "President Dewey."⁵³ One outstanding example of this was Life magazine's caption of November 1, where under a picture Dewey boarding a ferry boat, Life said: "The next President

⁴⁹Jack Redding, op. cit., pp. 235, 273, 289.

⁵⁰Rexford Tugwell, op. cit., pp. 436-437.

⁵¹"Black and White Beans," op. cit., 21.

⁵²"Democrats and Desperation," loc. cit.

⁵³Lamont Buchanan, Ballot for Americans (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 141, 143.

travels by ferry boat over the broad waters of San Francisco Bay."⁵⁴

The three major scientific polls of prediction forecast a Truman defeat. Archibald Crossley published three nation-wide surveys. One was conducted between August 6-15, another between September 13-20, and a final one between October 11-18. The composite in percentage showed 46.8 per cent of the people were for Dewey, while 43.6 per cent were for Truman, with the other votes distributed between Thurmond, Wallace, and the other minor candidates.⁵⁵

In two Gallup surveys--one conducted between October 6-20; the other was completed between October 15-29--the results of the first showed 1,186 for Dewey (thirty-eight per cent) to 969 (thirty-one per cent) for Truman. The second showed 1,175 for Dewey (forty per cent) and 964 for Truman (thirty-two per cent).⁵⁶ George Gallup, the most influential of the three major pollsters, had asked the voters: "If the Presidential election were held TODAY, how

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Frederick Mosteller, The Pre-election Polls of 1948 (New York: Social Research Council, 1949), pp. 319-324.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

would you vote--for Dewey, for Truman, for Wallace, for Thurmond?"⁵⁷ to get the results indicated.

Elmo Roper, another leading pollster, conducted four major forecasts. Between July 19-23, the results were 31.5 per cent for Truman, 46.3 per cent for Dewey. Between August 2-7, Truman had 31.4 per cent, Dewey 44.2 per cent. Between September 15-18, Truman received 29.7 per cent, Dewey 47.9 per cent. His last poll, conducted between October 25-28, found Truman with 32.9 per cent to Dewey's 43.3 per cent.⁵⁸

The last published prediction came when the New York Times put out an electoral map projecting the outcome of the election. The Times predicted that Dewey would get 345 electoral votes to Truman's 105. Thurmond would receive 38. Forty-three votes were in the "doubtful" column.⁵⁹

To help sustain this aura of psychological defeat for Truman, there were two political maxims that had stood the test of years. One, popularly known as Farley's Law, declared that the minds of the voters were made up six months before the election, and that political campaigning

⁵⁷

Ibid., p. 344.

⁵⁸

Ibid., pp. 344-347.

⁵⁹

Pre-election Forecast, New York Times, October 31, 1948.

was strictly a ceremonial function.⁶⁰ The other maxim was that no political party could remain in power indefinitely.⁶¹ According to political experts, these two laws predetermined Truman's defeat.

Truman's election in 1948 was, therefore, one of the most stunning upsets in history. When the votes were tabulated, Truman had a popular vote of 24,104,836 (49.5 per cent) and an electoral vote of 304. Dewey had a popular vote totaling 21,969,500 (45.1 per cent) and an electoral vote of 189. Thurmond received 1,000,000 votes and the other 38 electoral votes.⁶²

The results were in, but the questions had just begun. Why had Truman won despite sure defeat? There were many factors contributing to Truman's victory, several of them important. There was, first of all, the Truman personality. Everything focused on this as the major explanation for the victory. Had Truman been less persevering, less of a fighter, he would have given up early in the campaign. One hardly becomes a homespun, courageous sensation overnight.

⁶⁰Mosteller, op. cit., p. 355.

⁶¹Buchanan, op. cit., p. 141.

⁶²Associated Press Statistics on the 1948 Presidential Election, New York Times, December 11, 1948.

The qualities which were the winning ones were not newly developed by Truman. As early as 1945 people noticed that he was easy for them to identify with. They said that he ". . .instinctively thinks, feels, and acts like the average American."⁶³ His courage and recuperative powers combined with his blunt, simple style of oratory are the personality characteristics which resulted in victory in 1948:

He set out to 'tell the people the facts.' He was no orator; he stumbled over big words. . . .But Harry Truman succeeded in dramatizing himself; to millions of voters he seemed a simple, sincere man fighting against overwhelming odds. . . .Few men have been able to communicate their personality so completely. He never talked down to his audience. He showed no shadow or pompousness. . . .They knew just how he felt.⁶⁴

The average man made further comment: ". . .Truman was for us poor people."⁶⁵ Others spoke of Truman as the underdog: "You got to remember he was the underdog. It was like in American sports. You always root for the little guy who's getting a pushing around from the big one."⁶⁶ Truman's

⁶³Quote from the New York Times and New York Herald Tribune, October 31, 1948; and "Congress and President Truman March Forward," The Congressional Digest, XXIV (June, 1945), 161.

⁶⁴"Fighter in a Fighting Year," Time, LIII (January 3, 1945), 64.

⁶⁵"Truman--Reasons for Victory," New York Times Magazine, XCVIII (November 28, 1948), 1, 63.

⁶⁶Meyer Berger, "Reasons for Victory," New York Times, November 4, 1948.

affiliation with the average man can be summed up in this way: "President Roosevelt used to talk about the common man--but President Truman is a common man."⁶⁷ This asset was invaluable in the campaign of 1948.

Howard McGrath, in a post-election statement, almost discounted the Truman personality as a reason for his victory. He felt that the problems inside the Eightieth Congress had caused the victory:

The Republican Eightieth Congress may well have been the deciding factor in the election. . . . Without the performance of the Republican Congress, Dewey might possibly have been elected.⁶⁸

Although McGrath was generalizing his statement, there was an element of truth in it. An important tactic of the Truman strategy was connecting Dewey with the record of the Eightieth Congress. Truman hit hard at the Congress. The fact that he had controversial issues to attack also made his campaign more telling.⁶⁹

Another important factor in the Truman victory was his opponent's campaign. In a press conference after his

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Howard McGrath's Comments, New York Times, November 1, 1948.

⁶⁹ Roper Still Seeks Answers on Polls, New York Times, November 8, 1948; Redding, op. cit., p. 184; "Truman--Reasons for Victory," loc. cit., and "Truman Sweep," New York Times, November 7, 1948.

victory, Truman was aware that the Republican Party's blunders had helped him and brought down the house by saying that he thought his opponent was the greatest asset he had.⁷⁰ This, of course, was an over-simplification used for humorous effect, but there was an element of truth in the statement. Some Republicans thought that Dewey would have done better if he had not depended on a small group of Albany politicians to do his thinking for him. These men believed a professional politician such as Robert Taft would have done a better job. Truman's reiteration of New Deal policies was also cited as a reason for his victory. People complained of the Dewey personality, Republican over-confidence, the failure of Republicans to vote, and the "smug, supercilious campaign" conducted by the Republicans.⁷¹

Governor Dewey himself blamed as a major factor in his defeat overconfidence and failure among many Republicans to vote because they thought him a certain winner.⁷²

⁷⁰ Arthur Krock, "Why Dewey Lost," New York Times November 12, 1948, p. 22; and V. O. Key, Jr., Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups (fifth edition; New York: Thomas J. Crowell Company, 1964), p. 484.

⁷¹ Robert G. Whalen, "Our Forecast: What Went Wrong?" New York Times, November 7, 1948; "Truman--Reasons for Victory," loc. cit.; and Thomas A. Bailey, The American Paganat (second edition; Boston: D. C. Hearst and Co., 1962), p. 922.

⁷² Buddington Kelland, Comments on the 1948 Election, New York Times, November 16, 1948.

Statistics showed huge contrasts in the amount of time and energy each candidate spent getting votes. Dewey campaigned for six weeks, made 110 speeches, and covered 16,000 miles on his campaign trail. Truman campaigned for eight weeks, made 271 speeches, and covered 22,000 miles in his campaign. Truman's hard work paid off.⁷³

Whatever can be said about Republican tactics during the campaign, it is evident that the Dewey failure in 1948 was due partially to the Republican Party's failure to use the issues of the day to its advantage, and the evidence of a general apathy toward the election among many Republican voters.⁷⁴

The personalities of Dewey and Truman were definitely a factor in the campaign, but it is difficult to measure precisely how much the personality traits and tactics were responsible for the Truman victory. A more concrete evidence of victory can be seen in the influence labor had in in the 1948 campaign. President Truman had one explanation that was obviously a generalization, but significant nonetheless. He said: ". . .Labor did it. . . ."⁷⁵ Labor

⁷³Raymond Moley, "Presidency," Newsweek, XXXII (November 17, 1948), 16.

⁷⁴"The Republic: For Once Without Shouting," Newsweek, XXXII (November 8, 1948), 22-23.

⁷⁵Truman Sweep, loc. cit.

resented the Taft-Hartley Act. Truman had vetoed the Act. Therefore, America's working man in the long run voted for Truman despite the fact that he did not think Truman could win. Labor members turned out in large numbers to vote against the Taft-Hartley Act, and in the process helped carry Truman into office.⁷⁶

In assessing the results of the 1948 election, one farmer said: "I wasn't voting for a man or a party. I was voting for the price of wheat."⁷⁷ This farm vote was another important factor in the Truman victory. The farmers were content to stay with an administration that had been good to them rather than to risk their prosperity on a gamble with the Republican Party:

The farmers balanced the gains they had made under the Democratic administration against Dewey's promises. In the struggle between their pocketbooks and their ingrained conservatism, their pocketbooks won out. Dewey's margin in the farm areas was too slim to carry him to victory.⁷⁸

⁷⁶"Truman--Reasons for Victory," loc. cit.; "Fighter in a Fighting Year," loc. cit.; and "By Harry Truman: Campaign Barbs That Won the Votes. . .," op. cit., 5.

⁷⁷"Fighter in a Fighting Year," loc. cit.

⁷⁸"Significance of the 1948 Campaign," Newsweek, XXXII (November 8, 1948), 7; "Fighter in a Fighting Year," loc. cit.; "Truman Sweep," loc. cit.; "By Harry Truman: Campaign Barbs That Won the Votes. . .," loc. cit.; and Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), pp. 160-161.

A final factor in the victory need only be mentioned briefly. Three states, Ohio, Minnesota, and Illinois, held the balance of the election. Were it not for the sweeping victories of Governor Frank Lausche of Ohio, Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, and Senator Paul Douglas and Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, all of Truman's hard work plus the labor and farm vote might not have been enough to win the election.⁷⁹

It is evident that there was no one reason for Truman's victory. There were several, including Dewey's personality, Truman's effective campaign, and the ability of Truman to garner a large part of the farm and labor vote.

⁷⁹ Truman Sweep, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

PUBLIC OPINION POLLS AND THE ELECTION

When the reasons for the Truman victory were formulated, only half the picture of the 1948 Presidential election was completed. If possible, the question, "how could everyone, amateur and expert alike, be so unanimous in their prediction of defeat for Harry Truman in 1948?" must be answered in order to understand the election of 1948.

The press played a large part in the prediction of Truman's defeat. The New York Times made a comprehensive survey on the eve of the election and forecast an overwhelming electoral victory for Dewey. After the election proved it wrong, the Times attempted to explain why its prediction had erred. One reason the correspondents missed on their prediction was because they listened to the old-line political experts in the various states. These politicians had followed elections for years, and almost without exception, these men predicted a Dewey victory. The correspondents took the views of these "old pros" at face value, without attempting to investigate the matter for themselves. Many of the Times correspondents decided that if the Democrats did not think they could win, then there must be no hope for a Truman victory.

Not only did many correspondents accept the views of the politicians, they spent too much time talking among themselves. All that this accomplished was the solidification of preconceived opinions. They did not spend time asking the people what they thought about the election because the correspondents had their minds made up in advance. Likewise, they dismissed the large crowds that attended Truman's speeches as curiosity seekers. The correspondents spent their time in the office when they should have been out among the people.¹

The correspondents manifested almost identical political tendencies; therefore, they failed to make a correct forecast in 1948. Tradition indicated that no party could stay in office forever. Many correspondents believed that the odds had finally caught up with the Democrats, and the belief was strengthened by the might of the GOP trend (which had begun in 1938 and had been carried to its apex in the 1946 Congressional elections). Most political experts believed that the Democrats had suffered such crushing defeat in 1946 that they could not possibly win in 1948. They pointed to the vote-getting power of Dewey (23,000,000

¹Robert G. Whalen, "Our Forecast: What Went Wrong?" New York Times, November 7, 1948, p. 4E.

popular votes) in 1944 against Roosevelt as compared to Truman's declining popularity and utter lack of political influence evidenced in the 1946 elections. Reporters in several states based their predictions on traditional GOP strength, or on controversial regional contests that were supposed to bring out the Republican vote. Many thought that Dewey was so strong that he could carry himself and many weaker GOP candidates to victory.²

The press went wrong also, in that it depended as heavily on the public opinion polls. The Times correspondents, instead of interviewing people, quoted statistics as compiled by the leading polling organizations.³ Scientific opinion polls had enjoyed twelve years of unchallenged success and had come to be regarded as practically infallible. Congressmen, reporters, magazine editors, and the average man-in-the-street depended upon the polls to do their political thinking for them. The scientific polls were supposed to be much more reliable than the "amateurs." Yet Gallup, Roper, and Crossley did no better than the press or any other amateur forecaster.

By 1948, the art of polling had been taken out of the hands of the pollsters. Instead of objectively trying

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

to report statistics, the polls had become involved in a mad race conducted by the news media to get a "beat" on how the election was going to come out. There was a danger of vested interests taking over polling and using it for some selfish end. Because of their probable misuse, many people believed that all sorts of public forecasts should be eliminated as a possible danger to the legitimate use of the powers of persuasion.⁴

If a large part of the responsibility for the predicted defeat for Truman in 1948 can be traced to the opinion polls, a short history of the polls themselves will cast some light upon the reasons for their failure. First, the scientific public opinion polls were not initiated to predict elections, but rather to help companies to sell their products. Before the polls, companies used a process known as market analysis in which process a manufacturer who wanted to test public reaction to a new product paid representatives to go out and ask people about their reaction to the product. This method was unwieldy and expensive, and attempts were made to discover an easier and cheaper way to find out the public's opinion about certain products. They discovered that one hundred people in a certain income bracket living in ten cities could be sampled easier than one thousand people in

⁴Ibid.

one city, and that the results were more conclusive. Dr. George Gallup and Elmo Roper, both pioneers in this process which came to be known as "quota sampling," became directors of prosperous institutes of research.

As practiced by the pollsters, the process of quota sampling involved four basic steps. (1) It was necessary that the sample be typical of the area where the polling was being done. (2) The population in the area polled was divided into categories--age, religion, race, education, social levels, and economic status. It endeavored to be representative of all the factions within a community. Even though only a small number of persons were polled in quota sampling, they adequately represented the majority of people in the area, if the sample was properly conducted. (3) Interviewers contacted the selected representative individuals within a specific environment. They used questions prepared in advance by the sponsoring organization, i.e., Gallup, Roper, or Crossley. The interviewers themselves were not full time employees. They were temporary employees who received approximately eighty-five cents an hour for their job. They generally came from a middle class environment and included a cross section of professional workers--teachers, reporters, and lawyers. Their training usually consisted of on-the-job supervision for a short

period of time. Gallup's organization had one thousand three hundred interviewers, Roper's two hundred fifty-six. The average interview lasted from ten to fifteen minutes.

(4) The preparation of questionnaires and their subsequent evaluation was the most crucial part of the process. The questions asked had to be tactful, economical, and yet able to elicit the proper responses. When these four steps were completed, the data had to be processed, evaluated, and publicized.⁵

The pollsters turned to election forecasting in order to have a national testing ground for various sampling methods. They enjoyed immediate success. In the Presidential elections of 1936, 1940, and 1944, they successfully predicted the winning candidates. Because of this success, the public opinion polls came to be known as scientifically reliable.⁶

The election of 1948 exposed the pollsters as vulnerable in several ways despite the number of people interviewed. In a two-month period before the 1948 election, Dr. Gallup interviewed over 60,000 people. Roper's organization simultaneously conducted 5,200 interviews.

⁵Cabell Phillips, "And the Polls: What Went Wrong?" New York Times, November 7, 1948, p. 4E.

⁶Ibid.

After the election, the pollsters immediately began to re-evaluate their method of quota sampling. They had their interpretation of why they failed in 1948. First, all of the polls were confronted with a percentage of people who answered certain questions "undecided" or "no opinion." This type ranged from eighteen per cent to seven and one-half per cent in the campaign of 1948. The pollsters decided because of previous experience with the "undecided" to distribute their theoretical vote among the candidates. This was a highly unscientific process at best, involving guesswork and a naive belief that the people with "no opinion" or people "undecided" about how to vote would divide proportionately with those who expressed definite opinions. They also knew that they had miscalculated the "intensity" of the voters. (Until some method is devised to measure the degree of determination of the voter to carry through a stated course of action, the polls will be an unreliable indicator of public opinion). Interviews were weak. The scientific process in polling broke down at this point. Both the interviewer and the one interviewed were human and, therefore, subject to prejudice. Also, the average interviewer was only casually trained for his job and was allowed a broad area of discretion in choosing whom he would interview. He tended to interview people from his own class and therefore

fails to get an adequate cross section of beliefs and ideas from which come scientifically interpreted results.

Margin of error (four per cent) is but arbitrarily designated by the pollsters. In a close election it is almost impossible to accurately predict the winner. The result is, at best, only guesswork. In the 1948 election the margin of error was even more than four per cent as indicated by the chart below:

	Gallup	Roper	Crossley	Ave.	Voters	% of Error
Truman	44.5	37.5	45.0	42.3	50.0	18.1
Dewey	49.5	52.8	50.1	50.8	45.6	10.1
Wallace	4.0	4.4	3.3	3.9	2.4	39.2
Thurmond	2.0	5.3	1.6	3.0	2.0	33.2

7

It is now evident that seemingly irrelevant factors can profoundly affect a Presidential election. An example of an outside factor is the birth control issue in Massachusetts which brought out many Irish-Catholic, Democratic voters who might otherwise have stayed at home. Intangible factors such as apathy on the part of Republican voters and renewed determination to "go down fighting" by the Democrat organization, affected the 1948 campaign in a significant way, yet could not be predicted in advance. The conclusions

⁷Harold Isaacs, "How, Why and Whither," Newsweek, XXXII (November 29, 1948), 26.

that can be drawn about the polling process, as illustrated by the election of 1948, show that such methods are complicated; therefore, it will probably be many years before the processes can be refined enough to be termed scientific.⁸

The findings of the average man, the pollsters, news correspondents, and magazine editors may all be considered non-scientific opinions, most of them associated with prejudice of some sort and all of them produced with a small amount of investigation involved. Such, however, was not the case with the impartial investigation of the 1948 Presidential election which was conducted by the Social Science Research Council. This group produced its report on December 27, 1948. The pollsters and other leading sources of findings turned their information over to the Social Science Research Council who, in turn, appointed a committee to find out exactly why the public opinion polls had been so far "off base" in their predictions in 1948. The members of the committee ranged from Harvard and Yale professors to the president of a television network. In addition to the committee proper, a staff was appointed to gather and analyze data and prepare a preliminary report.⁹

⁸Letter to the Editor of the New York Times, November 20, 1948.

⁹News item in the New York Times, November 18, 1948.

The committee studied polling and decided to follow an eight-step process: (1) establish a proper sample by including a cross section of voters in the sample; (2) prepare an effective questionnaire and train the interviewer in the proper method of presenting and correcting the questionnaire; (3) take care in the selection of the people to be interviewed; (4) be objective in interviewing technique; (5) decide how many of the people interviewed will actually vote; (6) decide what should be done with the people who are "undecided" and those who are of "no opinion;" (7) process the data correctly (this will include adjustments and corrections) and, (8) devise a method to interpret and present the results.¹⁰

After personnel were selected and a process was adopted, the staff began to investigate polling results from the three major public opinion polls. The polls had not only made surveys during the 1948 election, they had also presented the results to the public via newspapers and radio. How had they represented their findings? Had they printed cold, hard statistics without confusing qualifications or had they released spiced descriptions to make

¹⁰Frederick Mosteller, The Pre-election Polls of 1948 (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1949), p. 3.

accounts newsworthy, but inaccurate.¹¹ To answer these questions involves a look at newspapers which publicized the results of the pre-election predictions. For example, Roper's polling service always suggested a headline for the newspapers to use; however, the suggested headline was rarely used. Newspapers often dramatized or distorted the polling results by the substitution of a sensational headline. Parts of reports submitted by the pollsters were sometimes omitted to save space. This sometimes caused distortions of the reports.¹²

Most of the time, there was a lapse between the time the poll was taken and the time the results were publicly announced. Unless the exact date of the poll was announced when publicized, there would be a distortion of the results in the minds of the public. Here, the polling organizations were at fault. They seldom provided the news media with exact dates on which their polls were taken. They "got around" giving this information by: (1) telling when the poll-taking had ended, but provided no information about its beginning date; (2) they stated that the release contained no suggested date of termination; (3) or they casually

¹¹Ibid., p. 29.

¹²Ibid., pp. 34-36.

mentioned the period when the poll was taken, causing the date to look insignificant.¹³

Not only did the reporters of poll opinions fail to report when polls were taken, they often failed to report the sizes and variability factors of samples used. The size of the sample was never indicated by the pre-election polls in 1948. The variability of the sample was only occasionally presented. Crossley ignored the variability factors in the first of his releases and inserted a phrase such as "normal mathematical limitations of results taken from samples of the population"¹⁴ in five out of his last seven releases. The Gallup organization referred to variability in two special releases, but not in thirty-nine regular releases. Roper made only one mention of variability.¹⁵

The success of the entire polling operation depends on the sampling method and the cross section which it yields. Crossley made only one mention of composition. Gallup mentioned it in two special releases. Roper did not mention it at all. To understand the responses made within the poll, the public should be aware of the questions asked. Gallup was the only one of the three polling

¹⁴Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 36-38.

agencies who published the list of his questions for the public to see. All of the "big three" were vague on adjustments they made in the interpretation of data. None indicated a process of analysis.¹⁶

Because many uncertainties are connected with the art of polling as peoples' views change from day to day, in publicizing the results of their findings the polls should not state dogmatically what is happening. At best, they can only state what might happen. The uncertainty of the pollsters should be indicated in their press releases. This can be done in special ways. (1) A simple sentence can be used to describe the sample or the population which a sample represents. (2) Every verb describing polling can be put into the past tense to indicate that the press release can be applied only to the time period when the sample was taken. (3) A press release can be qualified by using adverbs such as "probably" or a verb such as "seems." Not one of the three described the sample of population its poll represented. Crossley was the only pollster who wrote in past tense, and the Crossley organization only used qualifiers in forty-seven per cent of its releases.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

Investigations of the press releases of Crossley, Gallup, and Roper indicate that the three major polls used journalistic rather than scientific methods to publicize their findings. They failed to describe what process they used or to indicate the limitation of their particular process. Failing to inform the public, they distorted their findings.¹⁸ This was one major conclusion of the Social Science Research Council.

Next the committee turned to the problem of measuring the error that came from the very fact that the survey was a public opinion survey. The variability involved in predicting the electoral vote in a Presidential election was recognized. The average beginning margin of error was set at three percentage points. This omitted errors on the state level which would have made the percentage of error much higher. The closest that the poll-takers could possibly get to a specific estimate of Truman's electoral vote would have been to have said that he would get anywhere from 234 to 298 electoral votes. With such variability in estimates of the electoral vote, it seems unreasonable to expect that polling organizations could predict the electoral vote to any satisfactory degree of accuracy. If a polling organization cannot be expected to predict the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 73.

electoral vote very accurately, it is unreasonable to expect the winner of a Presidential election to be accurately predicted. Even if the pollsters could predict the popular vote to a certain extent the electoral vote wins the Presidential elections.¹⁹

Most studies do not try to allow for or explain the change from forty-nine to fifty-one per cent that is so important a variation band in predicting the electoral vote. Systematic errors of at least three per cent are common in elections. Here is a table showing the hypothetical situation of only two parties running in 1948 and the possibility of making a correct prediction with systematic error involved:

Systematic error toward Republicans in percentage points	Average electoral vote predicted for Truman	Chances of failure
0	316	10-100
1	283	33-100
2	252	63-100
3	224	74-100
		20

The committee examined the use of cross sections in the pre-election polls. All three major polls used the quota sampling method. One way to describe this method is to imagine that there are 1,000 beans in a barrel, 700 of the beans being white, while the other 300 beans are black. If

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

a person scoops up 100 beans from this barrel, he should get approximately 70 white and 30 black beans. The range of the possible error can be computed mathematically. As long as the barrel contains a significant amount of beans, the proportion should remain within the mathematical margin of error 997 times out of 1,000. The pollster's true problem was threefold. (1) He had to work out the true ratios involved in determining the composition of the "barrel;" (2) he had to choose his respondents (persons interviewed) carefully; and, (3) he had to be sure that the ratio that he had worked out and the respondents he had chosen to be interviewed corresponded exactly.²¹

Several weaknesses in the quota sampling process can be observed. In the 1948 election, the samples were representative of the 1948 vote in the sections from which they were drawn. All three major polls under-represented the lower class in their polls. It was assumed that since the educated higher class usually turns out to vote in a higher proportion than the lower class, the former should be more heavily interviewed. It is unlikely that proper results could ever have been obtained since this assumption was

²¹"The Black and White Beans," Time, LI (May 3, 1948), 21.

followed. Finally, there was a large systematic error in the 1948 election. This more than anything else is responsible for the distortion in the final results.²² Although statistical evidence is not available to measure how much the quota sampling method contributed to unpredictable (systematic) errors involved in the 1948 election predictions, there was a great amount of systematic error.

It may well have been due to the fallibility of the interviewers or respondents that there was in the 1948 sampling system. The committee concluded: "The mere fact that the measurements cannot be made is itself a serious weakness of the method."²³

An investigation into the interviewer and his influence must necessarily be scanty, for statistical information regarding this element is not abundant. The committee tried to evaluate them by examining: (1) race, class, and political composition of interviewers; (2) evaluating attempts to control bias; (3) determining how to measure cheating; (4) estimating how well the interviewer did on the job; (5) and re-evaluating interviewers' training practices. The committee concluded that the reason that nothing concrete

²²Frederick Mosteller, op. cit., pp. 113-115.

²³Ibid., pp. 115-116.

could be said about this area was because pollster and statistical expert alike had neglected this area of study. Pollsters and students of polling were to be blamed because of their lack of study in this important area of polling.²⁴

The questionnaire itself presented as many problems to the council as the questioner and questioned did. The area of questionnaire design is a complex one. Basically, this area can be broken down into three sections: (1) How well does the questionnaire elicit a person's true desire to carry through and actually vote for the person the respondent has outwardly declared himself to be for? (2) How well does the questionnaire allow for the uncommitted voter? (3) Does the questionnaire adequately cover the question of eligibility of voters? It can be readily seen that the preparation of questionnaires to measure the psychological commitment of, for example, a person's intention to vote, must be haphazard at best. The questionnaires can be technically perfect, which incidentally, they were not in 1948, and there will still be room for error.²⁵

When all of the other steps are taken, processing and adjusting of the data follow. As can be seen from a study

²⁴ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 153-162.

of the different steps involved in the process of poll-taking, by the time the process reached the final stage in the 1948 Presidential election, crucial errors had already been made. Even if the pollsters had correctly evaluated their data and processed it thoroughly, adjusting as they went, the results would have been inaccurate simply because of the errors already latent in the process. To complicate matters, the pollsters stopped polling in the last two or three weeks before the election, thereby missing the last-minute swing to Truman. This meant their failure in adequately measuring the undecided votes.²⁶

Preliminary observations prepared by the staff of the committee on analysis of the pre-election polls and forecasts are as follows: (1) The pollsters took on too large a task when they attempted to predict the winner of the 1948 Presidential election. Such a prediction could only be an educated guess. (2) The pollsters could have predicted a closer contest if they had studied their data more carefully. (3) Polling process is complex, involving eight crucial steps. The pollsters erred most in sampling and interviewing techniques, publicizing results, predicting behavior of undecided voters, and accounting for the

²⁶Ibid., pp. 174-244.

last-minute swing to Truman. (4) The errors were due to the same things as in previous elections, but the errors "showed" more in the 1948 election because it was a close one. (5) Error existed at every step of the polling process. (6) The publicizing of polling results distorted facts. This needs to be corrected. (7) Polling should not be scorned by the public. Occasional failures, like the one in 1948, do not cancel out the value of polling. However, in the 1948 Presidential election, evidence presented proves that the polls were inaccurate in creating the almost total aura of defeat they predicted for Truman.²⁷

The conclusions drawn by the committee proper were these: (1) the errors in 1948 were not much different than in previous years, but this discovery should not have reduced interest in pollsters' trying to find a way to eliminate errors involved in election forecasting; (2) quota sampling, as used by the major polls, is not superior to persistence prediction;²⁸ (3) techniques are not varied, and therefore will repeat themselves; (4) basic research of poll-taking itself must be undertaken, and every part of the polling

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 290-291.

²⁸ Persistence prediction states that conditions will repeat themselves. What happened last year is likely to happen again.

process itself must be examined and radically improved before the pollsters can again make election forecasts with confidence; (5) in the past, the pollsters have failed to educate the public about the margin of error involved in polling. Instead, they have taken undue credit for what they have done. Now they are reaping an equally undue amount of criticism about their polling process.²⁹

²⁹ Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, Presidential Elections: Strategies of American Electoral Politics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), pp. 137-138.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Truman-Dewey Presidential contest was marked by distorted predictions. When Truman took office in 1945, he was well-liked because of his honest and homespun personality. Soon, however, this evaluation became a detriment to him. The public compared him with Roosevelt, and the contrast between the two was obvious. Roosevelt's name and personality were famous; Truman was an unknown; therefore, the Presidency was Truman's, but the office's dignity still belonged to Roosevelt. Truman was handicapped in implementing the policies of his predecessor. He felt that he must pay obeisance to the Roosevelt version of the New Deal; and, because of this, he was to be handicapped. His inactivity in decision-making caused a "bewildered" tag to be placed upon his early administration.

The Congressional elections of 1946 provided an early turning point toward the Truman victory in 1948. Superficially, the 1946 Republican victory seemed to indicate that the Democrats were hopelessly divided, and that the Republicans were gaining, politically speaking. Actually, the 1946 Republican victory proved to be a "shot in the arm" for President Truman. Observers considered the 1946 elections

in Congress as a repudiation of Roosevelt's New Deal as administered by Roosevelt. From 1946 to 1948, Truman was expected to initiate a program of his own to replace Roosevelt's which he had been trying frantically to keep in effect. For the first time, he took the offensive in political affairs; therefore, it may be said that the 1946 election transformed Truman from a follower to a leader. To most observers, however, Truman's new policies in 1946 and 1947 seemed to be leading the Democratic Party down the road to disaster. The President took a strong stand on civil rights and vetoed the Taft-Hartley Act. He advocated a "get tough policy" in regard to Russia, and supported economic price controls. It is hard to say whether Truman so acted with a political motive in mind, but whatever his intentions may have been, most of these maneuvers contributed to his victory in 1948. The veto of the Taft-Hartley Act gained much support from labor. The stand on price controls gained a good part of the farm vote. His stand on civil rights alienated part of the South, but gained many liberal votes. Ironically, the homespun Truman personality which gained him the title of "muddler" in 1946 was to become the chief factor in the Truman victory in 1948. The very factors that contributed to the pessimistic attitude of most forecasters in 1946 were key factors in the Truman victory two years later.

Just before the convention, in early 1948, the odds against a Truman victory increased again. Henry Wallace announced his candidacy for President on the Progressive ticket. He was expected to draw as many as ten million votes from the Democratic fold. The South opposed Truman and threatened to vote in a bloc for Strom Thurmond, "Dixiecrat" candidate for President. Most indicative of the mood of the political experts was the "draft Eisenhower" movement that took place in June of 1948 because the Democratic Party did not think that Truman could win re-election. They began a rather desperate search for a suitable candidate. Eisenhower refused to be drafted. If the Democrats did not want to support Truman, what hope was there for a Truman victory in November?

The Republicans nominated Thomas Dewey, a candidate they considered a safe one to oppose Truman in 1948. Dewey's record as District Attorney and Governor of New York, and his proven nation-wide vote-getting ability (23,000,000 popular votes against Roosevelt in 1944) qualified him as a strong Truman opponent.

With reluctance, Truman was renominated at the Democratic National Convention in early July. He set the pattern for his campaign which followed with a firey acceptance speech. The highlight of the speech was

Truman's announcement that he was calling the Eightieth Congress back into session so that they could do the things their platform said they stood for. The move was obviously a political one. The "Turnip Day Maneuver" was denounced at the time but proved to be quite effective. The tactic successfully linked Governor Dewey with the "do-nothing" Eightieth Congress and gave Truman something to attack.

Truman developed a major means of delivering that attack in his chaotic "give 'em Hell" campaign. He had something to prove to the people. If he had not found some way to attract the public's attention and obtain their sympathy, there would have been little chance for his victory. The campaign tactics fitted the Truman personality. He was an average middle-class American who understood the "common man." He was at his best when speaking extemporaneously. He was not a polished orator, and it would have been difficult for him to conduct a dignified, orderly campaign. It had been demonstrated in 1945 that Truman had little talent to implement someone else's program. He was at his best when on the offensive, and his campaign in 1948 was a vivid example of this.

Thomas Dewey, on the other hand, conducted a "safe" campaign. Dewey later was much maligned for playing into Truman's hands by allowing him to make the issues, while

Dewey spoke of unity, God, and country. Yet, this was sound strategy in 1948. Being the favorite, Dewey felt that if he took the offensive, he might alienate some conservative Republican voters while gaining nothing from the Independents and Democrats. Most critics agree that the basic fault in the Dewey campaign lay in his overconfidence and cold personality. Dewey did not campaign hard enough because he felt that he could not lose. Being opposite to Truman personality-wise proved to be a detriment to his victory.

The farmers also played an important part in the Republican defeat. The Democratic New Deal which had been good to the farmers caused them to be reluctant to change loyalties. Labor supported Truman because he vetoed the Taft-Hartley Act. These two groups provided Truman with the votes necessary to offset the loss of part of the South and the Wallace vote.

Practically no one correctly predicted the election outcome. In campaign days news correspondents and other political observers took the "easy way out." They let the polls do their thinking for them. The polls were largely responsible for the creation of the consensus that Truman would lose in 1948.

They all predicted an unqualified Dewey victory. Even though the polls were widely accepted as scientific

measurement of established opinion, they proved to be unscientific. They attempted to simplify a complex process. The result was a prediction that was little better than a calculated guess. Furthermore, the polls attempted virtually an impossible task--that of objectively publicizing their polling results. They were caught in the pressure to make newsworthy items of their polling results. Because of this, the pollsters made unqualified predictions that they were unable to substantiate. It was possible to get away with this during the Roosevelt years because the elections were not close; however, when a close election came, their errors were spotlighted and their incompetence was shown.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the pollsters' mistakes. First of all, the process of polling in elections does have great potential and should not entirely be ignored. In using them, it should be remembered that they are not totally reliable. Their influence on public opinion is unquestioned. Particularly was this true in 1948. The danger exists even today that unscrupulous persons could shape public opinion with carefully prepared polls. Perhaps a more scientific use of polls, for example conducting them for predictions but not publicizing them as truth, would be a more accurate use of them. As they are used, in

either way, it should be remembered that people are unpredictable. No one has yet been able to map out the mind of the individual in black and white. Whatever else can be said, the Presidential election of 1948 verified this fact.

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Master of Arts THE TRUMAN VICTORY OF 1948

paper; bibliography, 89 titles.

Many periodicals, books, and newspapers described the events that made up the Truman victory of 1948. The Truman Presidency by Cabell Phillips, The Election Policy of 1948, prepared by the Social Science Research Council, and news items from The New York Times were particularly valuable.

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to

the School of Graduate Studies
Ouachita Baptist University

Several Times articles of Truman's victory in 1948 unique. Never had a Presidential candidate not re-elected faced more favorably with respect to victory. Upon taking office in 1949, Truman _____ with Franklin D. Roosevelt was not being regarded as a great President. Truman was considered to be an _____ by the loyal followers of Roosevelt.

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

The _____ of the _____ was an all-time low, and _____ the public. However, the reputation of the Truman version of the New Deal turned out to be a _____. The _____ defeat required _____ of his own. Truman _____ a strong civil rights program. _____ and taking a strong stand _____

by David Edwin Wallace

August, 1967

Wallace, David Edwin, The Truman Victory of 1948. Master of Arts (American Civilization) August, 1967; 93 pages; bibliography, 89 titles.

Many periodicals, books, and newspapers described the events that made up the Truman victory in 1948. The Truman Presidency by Cabell Phillips, The Pre-election Polls of 1948, prepared by the Social Science Research Council, and news items from the New York Times were particularly valuable.

Several factors made the Truman victory in 1948 unique. Never had a Presidential candidate for re-election faced more formidable odds against victory. Upon taking office in 1945, Truman was compared with Franklin D. Roosevelt who had been regarded as a great President. Truman was considered to be an incompetent bungler by the loyal followers of Roosevelt.

The Congressional elections of 1946 seemed to confirm the opinion of the New Dealers. Truman's popularity was at an all-time low, and discontent was high among the public. However, the repudiation of the Truman version of the New Deal turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The Congressional defeat required Truman to come up with a program of his own. Truman took the initiative by creating a strong civil rights program, vetoing the Taft-Hartley bill, and taking a strong stand on price controls.

By early 1948, the majority of political experts considered the chances of a Truman victory as next to nothing. Henry Wallace, a former Democratic president under Roosevelt, became alarmed over Truman's "get tough" policy with Russia and bolted the party to run for President on the Progressive ticket. He was expected to take numerous popular votes away from Truman. In addition, Truman had alienated the South with a strong stand on civil rights. Early in 1948, it looked as though Truman might lose a good portion of the Democratic "solid South." The worst blow to the Truman campaign was the "draft Eisenhower" movement. Many New Dealers and other disaffected liberals decided that Truman was unfit to run for President and attempted to draft General Dwight D. Eisenhower, a political novice, for the job. The movement gained momentary appeal until Eisenhower stopped the clamor with an unqualified repudiation of the "draft Ike" organization.

Truman was renominated with reluctance at the Democratic Convention in July. Very few gave him much of a chance for victory in November. Truman began his campaign of desperation by calling the Eightieth Congress back into session. This political move was criticized by the press, but focused the eyes of the nation on the Republican "do nothing" Congress. Truman's fighting tactics caught

the imagination of the public. In addition to attacking Congress, he attacked his opponent's "me too" campaign and insinuated that a vote for the Republicans was a vote against prosperity and the common man. Despite his energetic campaign, Truman was still rated at the bottom by the pollsters, who all predicted a Dewey landslide.

When the results were in, Truman had accomplished the biggest upset in American political history by defeating Thomas Dewey. Truman's effective campaign, combined with Republican overconfidence, were deciding factors in the victory. Other major reasons for the Truman victory were the heavy support given him by labor and the farmers seeking to maintain their own prosperity.

It is evident, in retrospect, that the majority of predictors let the public opinion polls do their thinking for them. The polls were wrong because they oversimplified the task of polling and allowed themselves to be controlled to a certain extent by the news media. By failing to take into account the undecided vote and the last minute swing to Truman, the polls completely misread the public mind.

The election of 1948 was a valuable lesson for the pollsters and has given them the incentive to improve their system. The campaign was also a tribute to the fighting spirit of Harry S. Truman and the public that re-elected him President of the United States in 1948.