

From Truman to Kennedy

Following the end of World War II, the United States found itself to be one of two world superpowers. With that title came awesome responsibility to provide leadership to the free world. This leadership is typically embodied in the American president.

With the death of President Franklin Roosevelt in April of 1945, Vice President Harry Truman became president. Truman, a simple and honest man from Missouri, led the nation to the end of the war, including ordering the use of atomic bombs against the Japanese in the summer of 1945.

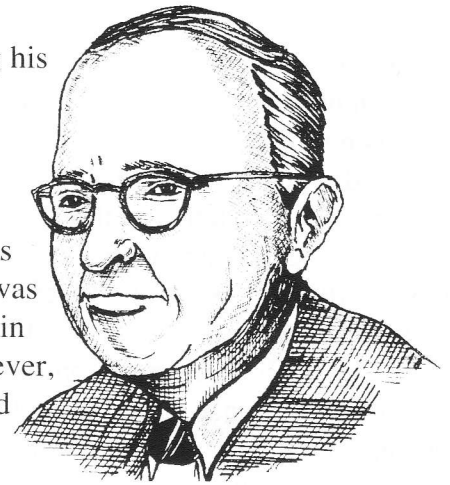
As the war came to an end, Truman faced serious problems at home. The process of demobilization, of soldiers and sailors coming home from the war and the regearing of American industrial plants from wartime to peacetime production was awkward. To help return America to a peacetime, normal economy, he lifted the wage and price controls which had been established during the war. Inflation resulted, proving to be a problem for Truman. Also, many worker strikes took place—adding to Truman's economic problems.

By 1948, Truman's popularity was very low. During that election year, he campaigned against Republican challenger Thomas Dewey from New York. To the surprise of many, Truman managed to defeat Dewey in November. During Truman's second term he announced his domestic plan called the Fair Deal. Under this program, Truman campaigned Congress for support of the Housing Act of 1949, a raise in the minimum wage from 40 to 75 cents an hour, an extension of Social Security, national health insurance, and an end to governmental racial discrimination. Congress passed some of his agenda, but racial legislation and health insurance did not make the cut.

During Truman's second term, his primary foreign problem would be the Korean War. At home, America was split over communism. Spy trials and Congressional hearings alerted Americans to the existence of communists in our own government.

By 1952, Americans elected another president, Republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower, Allied Supreme Commander during World War II. As a conservative, Eisenhower believed in decentralized

government. During his presidency, the American economy grew tremendously, creating one of the most prosperous eras in U.S. history. He was easily elected again in 1956. In 1957, however, the economy faltered slightly, but by 1959, it was much improved.



Harry Truman

During the Eisenhower years, the Cold War grew colder, as the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. grew more confrontational. America's commitment to Southeast Asia deepened under Eisenhower, and the Cold War spread to the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa. The 1950s witnessed the expansion of the nuclear arsenals of both the Americans and the Soviets, with each side deploying hundreds, even thousands of missiles carrying nuclear warheads.

In 1960, John Kennedy became president. This young, exuberant leader worked to end American poverty and to ensure justice for all Americans. His foreign policy with the Soviets was sometimes confrontational, causing occasional anxiety, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis, when Kennedy ordered the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba in 1962.

Review and Write

Describe some of the challenges faced by each of the following presidents.

Harry Truman:

Dwight Eisenhower:

John F. Kennedy: