

THE LAST HURRAH

by Robert H. Ferrell

Gloom hung like a great invisible fog over the Democratic delegates who gathered in Philadelphia during the dog days of July for the party's 1948 national convention. They saw nothing ahead but certain defeat in November. They behaved, reported the Associated Press, "as though they [had] accepted an invitation to a funeral."

Three weeks earlier, during an exuberant session in the same city, the Republicans had triumphantly nominated "the next president of the United States," Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York. California's genial governor, Earl Warren, the vice-presidential nominee, gave the ticket perfect East-West balance. Victory seemed assured.

Former representative Clare Boothe Luce of Connecticut had epitomized the G.O.P.'s confident mood. She had declared from the podium that Harry S. Truman, whom the Democrats seemed condemned to nominate, was a "gone goose."

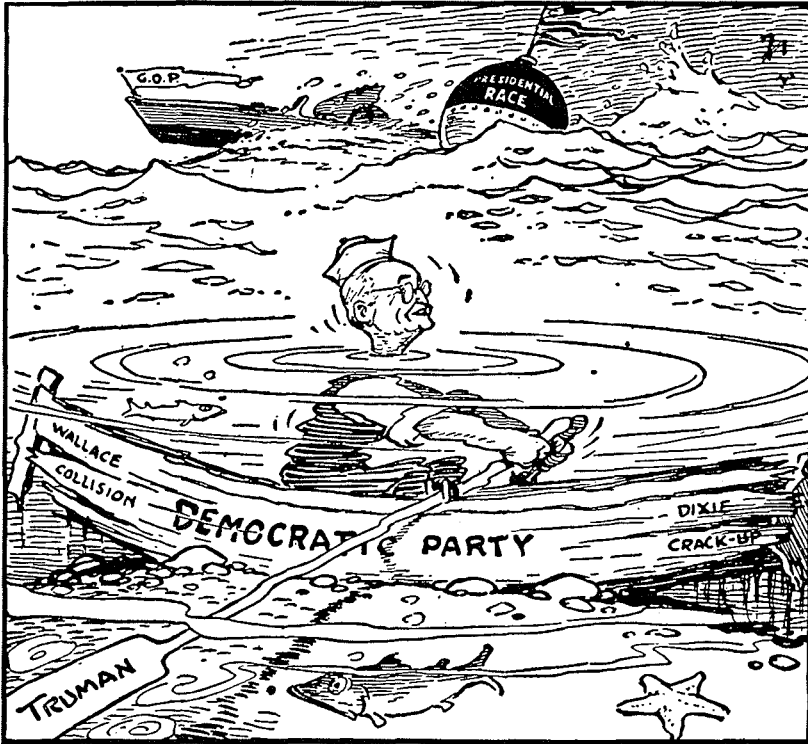
To the cheers of the assembled Republicans, Mrs. Luce had explained why. The party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, she gleefully observed, was now split into three factions: "a Jim Crow wing, led by lynch-loving Bourbons . . . a Moscow wing, masterminded by Stalin's Mortimer Snerd, Henry Wallace . . . and a Pendergast wing run by the wampum and boodle boys . . . who gave us Harry Truman."

Even as Mrs. Luce spoke in Philadelphia, Representative James Roosevelt of California, FDR's son, had been engaged in a final effort to persuade General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then president of Columbia University, to accept the Democratic nomination. A heterogeneous array of disenchanted labor leaders, Northern liberals, big-city bosses, and Southern conservatives backed his "dump Truman" drive.* Forty years ago, most delegates were not committed to candidates in advance by primary election votes as they are today. Party leaders might still have been able to deliver the nomination—if Ike wanted it. More than once, Eisenhower had declared that he was not interested; finally he said it with an exclamation point.

On July 9, as the anti-Truman Democrats were preparing to stage a pre-convention caucus in Philadelphia, the hero of D-Day telegraphed the dissidents: "I ask you to accept my refusal as final and complete, which it most emphatically is."

As a final gesture, Senator Claude Pepper, a quixotic Florida liberal,

*Among the disenchanted were South Carolina's Governor J. Strom Thurmond; Leon Henderson, chairman of the liberal organization, Americans for Democratic Action; Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers of America; and Chicago party boss Jack Arvey.



Truman's plight, as depicted by a Chicago Tribune cartoonist in 1948. Later, the Tribune would print its famous "Dewey Defeats Truman" headline.

tossed his own hat into the ring. A deep silence greeted—and ended—his candidacy.

All drama, all suspense, indeed all hope, seemed to have been drained from the Democratic conclave even before it began. As the delegates assembled on Monday afternoon, July 12, wrote journalist Irwin Ross in *The Loneliest Campaign* (1968), "the liveliest member of the Democratic party seemed to be the papier mâché donkey, with its flashing electric eyes and wagging tail, which stood on the marquee of the Bellevue-Stratford," headquarters of the Truman forces. No band played in the lobby of the Bellevue-Stratford (or in the other hotel lobbies), the crowds were subdued, and bartenders complained that business was not half as brisk as it had been when the Republicans were in town. Many of the delegates gamely carried placards—ALL 48 in '48, KEEP AMERICA HUMAN WITH TRUMAN—but the messages seemed to mock reality.

Adding to the Democrats' gloom was the sticky summer weather,

unrelieved by air conditioning, which was still a relatively rare amenity. Philadelphia's Convention Hall in mid-July was like the inside of a hot air balloon. New, but much in evidence, were the bulky TV cameras. (The G.O.P. gathering three weeks earlier had been the first U.S. political convention ever televised.) TV was still in its infancy; stations in only a few Eastern cities, serving 400,000 households, broadcast the conventions. The TV lights further raised the temperatures inside Convention Hall; in other respects, the cameras would have little impact in 1948.

On Monday, the only question seemed to be: Who would Truman be able to persuade to join him as running mate in a lost cause? Truman's aides had sounded out Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, a darling of the liberals. But, on Monday morning, Douglas declined. Word got back to Truman that the former New Dealer (he had headed the Securities and Exchange Commission before FDR named him to the Court) said that he could not be a "No. 2 man to a No. 2 man."

The Civil Rights Plank

The matter was settled on Tuesday morning. A Truman spokesman told reporters that the president would accept the Senate minority leader, Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky, "if the Democratic convention sees fit" to nominate him. Surprisingly, Truman's old Senate crony had actively lobbied behind the scenes for the nomination.

The white-haired Barkley was 70 years old, and Truman said it took him five minutes to sign his name, but he was a colorful speechifier of the old school. He could stir audiences, especially Southern white audiences. Truman could use Barkley's talents.

Indeed, when Barkley got the presidential nod, Truman still hoped that the angry Dixie Democrats—Mrs. Luce's "lynch-loving Bourbons"—might be persuaded not to bolt the party. Just before the convention, Truman's lieutenants had tried to minimize the damage done by the president's own prior civil rights proposals (e.g., an antilynching law, abolition of the poll tax, a law barring segregation on interstate trains, airliners, and buses). They successfully lobbied for a mild civil rights statement in the proposed party platform. The statement called upon Congress to advance legal equality for blacks "to the limit of its constitutional powers"—an escape clause for the Southerners, who argued that most proposed federal antisegregation initiatives would violate constitutional guarantees of states' rights.

But as the convention got underway, the compromise plank sud-

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denly seemed to please neither Southerners nor liberals. The Southerners planned to introduce at least one substitute. And, on the second night of the convention, the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA),* a year-old organization of anti-Communist liberal activists, held its own fevered all-night strategy session. The members resolved to present a stronger plank to the convention. In effect, the plank would endorse Truman's own proposals. The ADA'ers, few of them professional politicians, begged Hubert H. Humphrey, the 37-year-old mayor of Minneapolis who was running for the Senate in 1948, to be their spokesman. Party elders warned Humphrey that he would split the party and sacrifice a promising career in national politics for a "crackpot" cause. But Humphrey rejected the warning.

On the convention floor that Wednesday afternoon, the Northern big-city bosses, led by Ed Flynn of the Bronx, breezily announced their approval of the Humphrey-ADA proposal. They felt that a strong civil rights plank would not help Truman, who seemed to be beyond help, but it might bring out the black vote in their own local elections. Their general attitude, expressed succinctly in private, was "To hell with it all." That was the way the convention was going.

As the steamy afternoon wore on, contending speakers took the podium to try to rally support for one of four new civil rights planks—three Southern, one liberal. The Southerners tried conciliation: Former governor Daniel Moody of Texas said that he sought only "the restoration of harmony in the Democratic party." But Hubert Humphrey, in a speech that won him national attention, chose confrontation. "The time has arrived," he declared, "for the Democratic party to get out of the shadow of states' rights."

Pigeons of Peace

The roll was called. The first Southern proposal went down to defeat, 925 to 309. Two more "states' rights" substitutes were shouted down in voice votes. Then, the roll was called for the Humphrey plank, and it squeezed through, 651½ to 582½. As a cacophony of huzzahs and boos filled the great hall, Handy Ellis, chairman of the Alabama delegation, signaled frantically for recognition from the convention chairman, Representative Sam Rayburn of Texas; he wanted to announce Alabama's walkout. Rayburn refused to give Ellis the floor. The convention was suddenly in recess.

When the convention resumed work that evening, Ellis got his wish. Half the Alabama delegates, and all of those from Mississippi, followed as the Alabaman cried, "We bid you goodbye!" and stalked out. The Solid South had fractured for the first time since Reconstruction.

*Among the ADA's founders were scholars Reinhold Niebuhr, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; Washington lawyers James H. Rowe, Jr., and Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.; and labor leaders David Dubinsky (of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union) and Walter Reuther.

Then, around 7:00 P.M. the delegates got down to the anticlimactic business of formally nominating Truman and Barkley. "We're Just Mild About Harry," read several delegates' signs. The remaining Southerners chose to contest the inevitable by nominating Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, who obtained 263 votes to Truman's 947½. (The other ½ vote went to Paul McNutt, former governor of Indiana.) No one offered the traditional motion to make the vote unanimous. The Southerners were in no mood for such routine courtesies.

By the time the convention was ready for Truman to make his appearance, the delegates were cross, wet with perspiration, and bone-tired. The radio networks were still ready to broadcast Truman's acceptance speech, but the hour was late: 1:45 A.M., Thursday morning. Across the country, most radio listeners, earlier perhaps as exasperated as the delegates, were now far more comfortable—they were sound asleep. In the Midwest and the East, most morning newspapers were already printing their main editions.

Then came the convention's crowning indignity. Mrs. Emma Guffey Miller, sister of former senator Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania, had arranged matters so that when the president appeared on the rostrum, 50 "doves of peace" would swoop out from under a floral Liberty Bell.

The president entered the hall to the strains of "Hail To The Chief," nattily attired in a white linen suit and two-tone shoes. The wilted delegates roused themselves to give him a standing ovation. As Truman consulted the notes for his address, the bird cage was opened, and instantly there were doves (i.e. pigeons) everywhere. Long cooped up, thirsty, the birds were as tired as the delegates; some were beyond fatigue—they were dead, and tumbled lifeless to the floor.

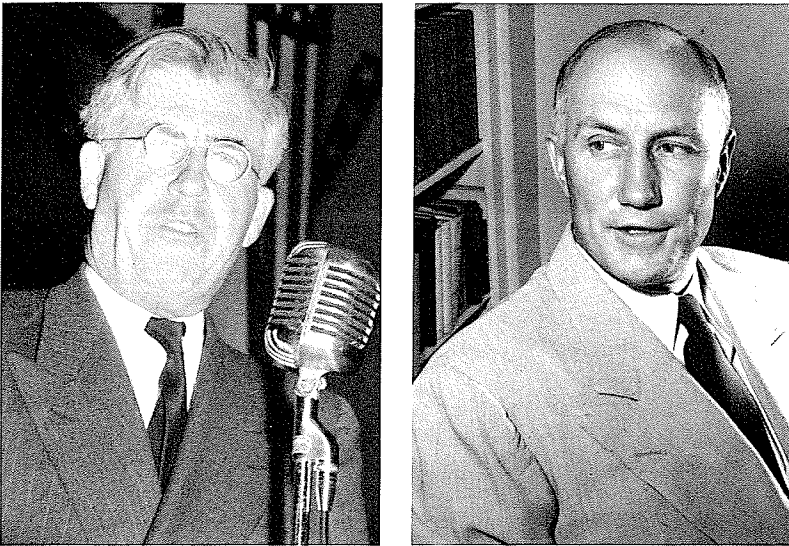
The rest flapped wildly about. A couple of squadrons homed in on the shining bald head of Sam Rayburn, prominent on the rostrum. He flailed his arms and the doves of peace started flying in all directions. Finally the coast-to-coast radio audience heard the Texan growl in despair, "Get those goddamned pigeons out of here."

The Dixiecrat Challenge

Then Truman began. And, to the surprise of newsmen, the man from Missouri brought the Convention Hall to life at two o'clock in the morning. "Senator Barkley and I will win this election and make those Republicans like it—don't you forget that!" he shouted. The delegates roared their approval. "It was the first time they had heard anybody say 'win' as if he meant it," commented *Time* later.

"Never in the world were the farmers... as prosperous [as today]," Truman thundered, "and if they don't do their duty by the Democratic party, they are the most ungrateful people in the world! And I'll say to labor just what I've said to farmers."

He tore into the "worst" 80th Congress and issued a challenge to



Presidential candidates Henry A. Wallace and J. Strom Thurmond.

its Republican majority: "On the 26th day of July, which out in Missouri we call 'Turnip Day,'* I am going to call Congress back and ask them to pass laws to halt rising prices, to meet the housing crisis—which they are saying they are for in their platform." Truman said he would propose some of his old favorites: federal aid to education, national health insurance, and a boost in the minimum wage, among other items. "They are going to try to dodge this responsibility," Truman predicted, "but what that 'worst' 80th Congress does in its special session will be the test of whether they mean what they say."

Truman's evocation of the party's old-time religion cheered the Democrats enormously. "You can't stay cold about a man who sticks his chin out and fights," explained one delegate. The president's decision to put the Republican Congress on the spot was widely applauded. As they packed their bags late on Thursday, however, few delegates harbored any illusions that a single give-'em-hell speech would make much difference on November 2.

As if to hammer the point home, some 6,000 disaffected Southerners gathered that Saturday at a red brick municipal auditorium in Birmingham, Alabama, and cobbled together the States' Rights Democratic Party—Dixiecrats, for short. Waving Confederate flags and singing "Dixie," the assembled dissidents nominated Governor J. Strom Thurmond, 46, of South Carolina for president, and Governor Fielding L.

*Actually, the president fudged a bit. According to Missouri folklore: "On the 25th of July/Sow your turnips, wet or dry." In 1948, however, the 25th fell, inconveniently, on a Sunday.

Wright, 53, of Mississippi for vice president.

The Dixiecrat platform denounced Truman's "infamous and iniquitous program [of] equal access to all places of public accommodation for persons of all races, colors, creeds and national origin," and extolled the doctrine of states' rights. This was not simply racist balderdash; Thurmond, who was no yahoo, truly believed in the federalism of 1787. Unvoiced was the Southerners' lingering resentment of FDR's New Deal, which, they felt, had infringed upon state prerogatives and encouraged Southern blacks to be "uppity."

Most of the South's prominent elected Democrats—e.g., Senators Harry Byrd of Virginia and Richard Russell of Georgia—shunned the Dixiecrat convention. They were unenthusiastic about Truman, but they were not prepared to desert the national party. Still, the Dixiecrats seemed sure to attract many disaffected white Democratic voters in the South on Election Day—just as another Southerner, George C. Wallace, would attract them in another tumultuous year, 1968.

Then, as expected, former vice president and Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, 59, officially became the fourth important candidate in the race.* On July 23, Wallace's party (it was nameless until the convention claimed the legacy of the turn-of-the-century Progressives) met in Philadelphia's Convention Hall. But Wallace drew a different crowd. The delegates, some 3,200 of them, were mostly earnest youths in blue jeans and open-necked sports shirts. Absent were all of the prominent liberal Democrats and labor leaders (e.g., Hubert Humphrey, Walter Reuther) who had looked to him for leadership as recently as 1946.

Reds and Pinks

While these liberal Democrats had become anti-Communist as the Cold War worsened, Wallace had moved left, refusing, for example, to condemn the Soviet-backed coup in Czechoslovakia in early 1948. Surveying the world's ills, he chose to blame America first. And Wallace's campaign was clearly controlled by his best-organized supporters—the American Communist Party and its fellow travelers. When a delegate in Philadelphia naively proposed a resolution criticizing U.S. foreign policy, but stating that "it is not our intention to give blanket endorsement to the foreign policy of *any* nation [i.e. the Soviet Union]," Wallace's operatives quickly smothered it.

Wallace tried to dampen the controversy over Communist influence in his campaign. But he was not helped by his running mate, Senator Glen Taylor, 44, a well-meaning but eccentric Idaho Democrat. (The former country singer serenaded the Progressives with "When You Were Sweet Sixteen.") Taylor explained that the Progressives welcomed the votes of "pink" Communists who were advocates of nonvi-

*The other minor party candidates were Norman M. Thomas (Socialist), Claude A. Watson (Prohibition), Edward A. Teichert (Socialist Labor), and Farrell Dobbs (Socialist Workers).

olent change, but spurned the votes of “red” Communists. Overall, the convention, with its accompanying Old Left slogans, was a public relations debacle.

Yet journalists were impressed by Wallace’s ability, despite a wooden speaking style, to draw large crowds. He had been stumping the country for two years, and audiences had *paid* to hear him. In Philadelphia, some 30,000 spectators, many of them brought down on special trains from New York, paid up to \$2.60 apiece for seats in Shibe Park, where Wallace gave his acceptance speech. Wallace had no hope of winning on November 2 but, according to a Gallup poll taken in June, he might attract six percent of the vote—enough to sink Truman.

Dewey’s Calls for Unity

As Wallace retreated to his farm (“Farvue”) in South Salem, New York, not far from the Dewey farm in Pawling, to brood over the Philadelphia disaster, the journalists shifted their attention to Washington.

Summoned by the president, an unhappy Republican-controlled Senate and House assembled in the stifling heat of late July in the nation’s capital. Truman greeted them with a New Deal speech, calling for standby price and wage controls, federal help for housing, and other measures. He also issued two landmark executive orders—one ending segregation in the armed forces, another protecting the rights of blacks in the civil service.

As Truman had hoped, the special session quickly turned into a donnybrook among its G.O.P. members. Representative Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Republican Party’s national chairman, urged action of some sort on Truman’s proposals. So did Arthur H. Vandenberg, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who spoke to Senator Robert A. Taft, leader of the Republican conservatives. Taft would have none of it. “No,” he replied, “we’re not going to give that fellow [Truman] anything.”

To Truman’s delight, the intramural G.O.P. fracas spilled over onto the floors of the Senate and House. In the Senate, for example, Wisconsin’s Joseph McCarthy clashed with fellow Republican Charles Tobey of New Hampshire over the latter’s attempt to win passage of a generous public housing bill. McCarthy won. The two-week Turnip Session produced little legislation of note.

Dewey saw at once that he would have to be careful to hold together his party’s conservatives and moderates. During the campaign, the 46-year-old governor would avoid almost all domestic issues, choosing instead to issue statesmanlike calls for “unity” of party and nation.

In a true act of statesmanship, Dewey also declared, in effect, that foreign policy would be off-limits as a campaign issue. On June 24, the very day that Dewey won the Republican nomination, the Soviet Union had suddenly closed off all land routes to West Berlin, isolated inside

Soviet-held territory. In late July, as U.S. Air Force transports were ferrying food and supplies to the beleaguered city, Dewey announced that "the present duty of Americans is not to be divided by past lapses, but to unite to surmount present dangers."

The campaign began in earnest in mid-September. During the autumn, Dewey and Truman would each make three major trips, traveling exclusively by rail—the last U.S. presidential campaign so conducted. En route, each gave several hundred speeches, speaking from the rear platforms of his train to crowds gathered at small-town "whistle stops" along the way, and leaving the train for mass rallies organized by local party leaders in larger cities and towns. Some of the speeches were broadcast nationally on radio; very few were even locally televised. (In 1948, only CBS offered TV news, a 15-minute evening broadcast.)

Truman got started first, departing Washington's Union Station aboard his armored Pullman car, the *Ferdinand Magellan*, early on the morning of Friday, September 17. He headed through the Midwest and over the Rockies to San Francisco, with numerous stops along the way, then looped back through Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri (his home state), Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, and returned to the capital, covering 18 states in 15 days. Sticking to his preconvention strategy, he came out swinging, and the crowds loved it. He lambasted the "do-nothing" 80th Congress. He said that G.O.P. stood for Grand Old Platitudes. Also Gluttons of Privilege. The Republicans wanted "company-union unity." They wanted "two families in every garage."

Truman dealt chiefly with four issues, all ignored, he announced, by the "good-for-nothing" 80th Congress: the high cost of living, the right of workingmen to join labor unions, the plight of the farmer, and, to a lesser extent, civil rights. As reporters noted, his goal was no mystery. He was trying to reassemble the New Deal coalition that had won four elections for FDR.

Indeed, the president sometimes campaigned not against Dewey but against Herbert Hoover, reminding voters of the Great Depression: "You remember the Hoover cart . . . They said it is the only automobile in the world that eats oats."

Wowing the Farmers

With the notable exception of the miners' John L. Lewis, virtually all of the nation's union leaders (including Ronald Reagan of the Screen Actors' Guild) had finally endorsed the president after Philadelphia. Now, Truman sought to stir up the rank and file. In Akron, Ohio, the Rubber City, he said that the Republicans had merely gained their first anti-union objective when they passed the Taft-Hartley Act over his veto. In Hartford, Connecticut, he warned that the G.O.P. favored "labor-baiting, union-hurting, yellow-dog open-shop contracts."

And then there were the farmers. A case can be made that a minor

decision by the 80th Congress that spring, its refusal to allow the U.S. Commodity Credit Corporation to acquire more (costly) grain storage bins, threw the election to Truman. The grain harvest in 1948 was huge. Prices were tumbling; corn dropped from \$2.46 a bushel in January 1948 to \$1.21 in November. The parity support level was \$1.53, but with no bins available, farmers could not deposit their corn and collect parity payments.

In his first major Corn Belt speech, at the National Plowing Contest in Dexter, Iowa, Truman excoriated the "reactionary" Republicans for "attacking the whole structure of price supports for farm products." After the president finished his prepared address, he told the throng how he could sow 160 acres of wheat "without leaving a skip." The farmers loved it. (In November he took Ohio, hitherto solidly Republican, probably on the farm issue.)

Truman was not a high-road campaigner. In retrospect some of his speeches in 1948 amounted to sheer demagoguery; in any case, they vastly exaggerated the sins of his Republican foes. One example: "If you let the Republican reactionaries get complete control of the Government," the president told a cheering crowd of 100,000 souls in Detroit's Cadillac Square, "I would fear . . . for our democratic institutions of free labor and free enterprise."

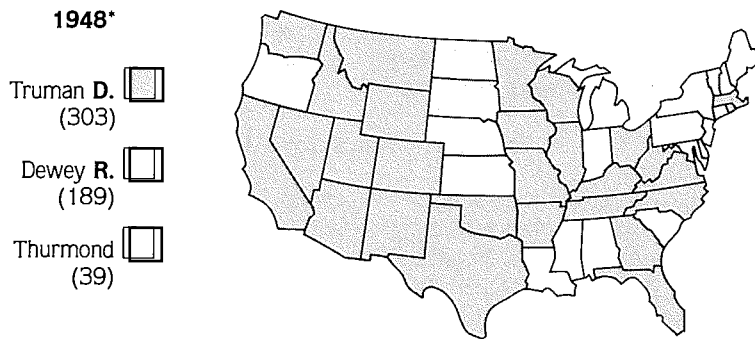
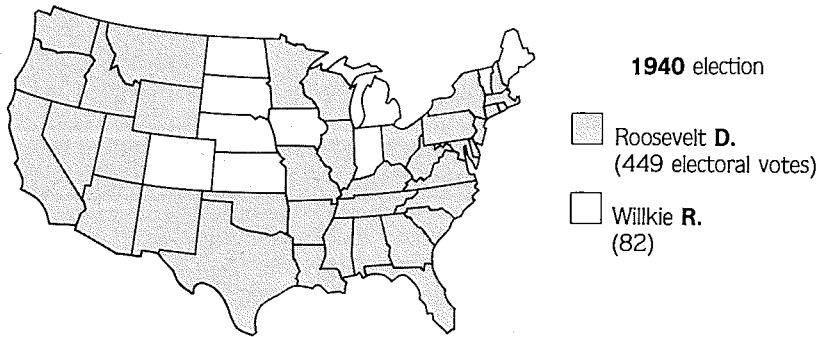
No Anti-Communist Fevers, Yet

Dewey, boarding his "Victory Special" in Albany, New York, to begin a cross-country tour on September 19, was unruffled by Truman's rhetorical excesses. To him, they seemed like shouts of angry desperation. Buoyed by the conventional wisdom of the day, the candidate surrounded himself with an aura of invincibility. "The governor of New York," observed Sidney Shallett in the *Saturday Evening Post*, "talks not like a man who wants to be President, but like a man who already is." The major opinion polls, which had accurately predicted every presidential winner since 1936 (notwithstanding the *Literary Digest* fiasco that year), gave Dewey a commanding lead. Newsmen covering the campaign generally agreed that it was all over but the inauguration.

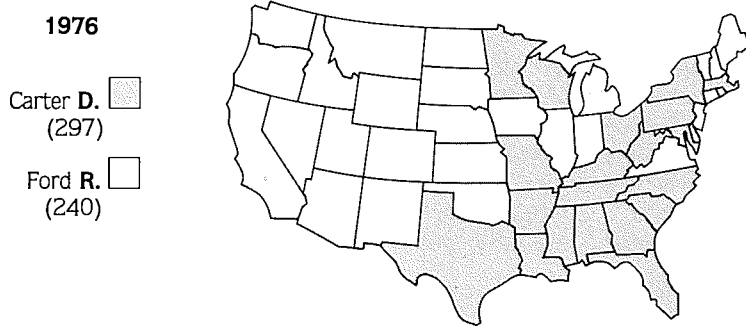
Even so, the governor did not seem to galvanize the crowds. Polished, sonorous, he produced few sparks. His ambition was too obvious; he calculated everything. He was stiff with people—he was an "acquired taste," as Robert Donovan of the Republican *New York Herald Tribune* put it—and the imminence of the presidency seemed to increase his hauteur. During the G.O.P. primaries, Dewey had consented to a certain amount of campaign shenanigans; now, he refused to stoop so low as to don a 10-gallon hat or an Indian headdress.

The governor's campaign strategy, such as it was, was to avoid splitting his party or raising issues that could cost him votes. His speechwriters eschewed any initiatives that might make trouble. They

FROM THE NEW DEAL TO REAGAN, 1940-80



*Not shown: In 1948, a "faithless" Tennessee elector who was pledged to Truman cast his Electoral College vote for Thurmond. "Faithless" electors cast single votes for Wallace in 1968, Reagan in 1976.



NOTE: In 1968, '76, and '80, Alaska voted Republican, Hawaii Democratic.

The story since 1940: An electoral potpourri, as old regional loyalties have eroded. The Democratic "Solid South" first broke up in 1948; the West began leaning Republican in 1952. Today, every candidate for the presidency, Democratic or Republican, must assemble a new coalition of voters.

wrote endlessly of "unity," and sometimes wrote of nothing at all.

To a farm audience, Dewey said: "I pledge to you that your next administration will cooperate with the farmers of the country to protect all people from the tragedy of another Dust Bowl."

On conservation: "I propose that we develop a national policy that will really save our forests through federal, state, and local cooperation."

At a political dinner: "The highest purpose to which we could dedicate ourselves is to rediscover the everlasting variety among us."

Truman was fortunate in that Dewey chose not to exploit the first startling revelations about Soviet spies in high places that had already made headlines that summer. Testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee, Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers, two former Communists, had implicated Alger Hiss, a onetime Roosevelt appointee in the U.S. State Department, and other former Washington officials. Truman, off the cuff, dismissed it all as a "red herring." But Dewey, reporters noted, stirred the loudest applause when he happened to raise the issue, even though his rhetorical sallies were restrained. "I suggest you elect an administration that simply won't appoint any [Communists] in the first place," the governor said in Los Angeles.

In 1949, China would fall to Mao Zedong, and the United States would soon be swept by anti-Communist fevers. Republicans would ask, "Who lost China?" and point to softies or worse in the Truman administration. In 1950, Senator McCarthy would charge that the U.S. State Department employed 205 "card-carrying Communists."

Dewey Loses His Cool

However, in the fall of 1948, Dewey seemed to feel that he did not need to invoke the Red Menace or any other menace in order to win.

In mid-October, each candidate, making the last foray of the campaign, boarded a train for a whistle-stop tour of the Midwest.* Dewey's advisers urged him to take the gloves off. Like many newsmen, they had noted that Dewey's crowds were smaller and less enthusiastic than the president's. But Dewey held to the high road. Few reporters or editors questioned his strategy; they simply refused to believe that Truman could win. *Newsweek* had the most ingenious explanation: "In every [prior] campaign Governor Dewey had entered he had lost when the crowds were big and won when the crowds were small."

On October 12, losing his cool, Dewey hurt himself mightily. At Beaucoup, Illinois, his campaign train suddenly started to back up into the crowd. No one was hurt. Dewey, however, blurted out, "That's the first lunatic I've had for an engineer. He probably ought to be shot at sunrise, but I guess we can let him off." Television was not needed to make the incident a gaffe of national proportions. Newspapers relayed

*Dewey and Truman largely avoided the Deep South, conceding it to Thurmond. But Wallace bravely campaigned there and, for his pains, was pelted with eggs on several occasions.

Dewey's words quickly enough. It did not help the governor with the labor vote. To the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, on October 21, Truman remarked, "He objects to having engineers back up. He doesn't mention, however, that under the 'Great Engineer' [Hoover] we backed up into the worst depression in our history."

The polls did not reflect these difficulties. Elmo Roper, of the Roper poll, had *quit* taking samples as early as September 9, with the comment that only a "political convulsion" could prevent Dewey from winning. The Crossley poll showed 49.9 percent for Dewey, 44.8 for Truman. Gallup on October 30 produced about the same results.

The polls were, in effect, endorsed by 50 top political writers queried by *Newsweek*—David Lawrence, Arthur Krock, Walter Lippmann, James Reston—and they all picked Dewey to win. Moreover, Dewey had 65 percent of the daily newspapers' editorial endorsements, including those of the *New York Times* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; Truman had 15 percent. To journalists and politicians alike, it still looked like a cakewalk for Dewey.

Voting 'For' and 'Against'

On election night, November 2, *New York Times* reporter Cabell Phillips, later a Truman biographer, was as sanguine as most of his colleagues in the home office about what the morning headlines would say. After work, he decided to take in a Broadway show. At the second intermission he strolled to a bar for refreshment. There he heard a radio newscast—a jumble of vote totals, precinct numbers, names of states. Then, "with a swallow of Scotch just on its way past the windpipe," he heard a report that caused him to gasp. "Truman's lead now looks almost unassailable. If he can hold his edge in Ohio . . ." Coughing and choking, Phillips slapped a dollar on the bar and sprinted for the *Times* newsroom three blocks away. He was not alone in his surprise.

The outcome was not clear until the following morning at 9:30, when the final Ohio tally came in. Nationally, it was 24.2 million for Truman versus 22 million for Dewey. Wallace and Thurmond each polled some 1.2 million votes, and Thurmond siphoned off Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana. (Truman carried the rest of the traditionally Democratic South.) Henry Wallace won no states but, thanks to his appeal to the Left, apparently deprived Truman of victories in New York, Michigan, and Maryland, and almost cost him California.

Despite his two million vote margin, the president had just squeaked through. A cumulative shift of only 30,000 votes apportioned among Ohio, Illinois, and California would have given Dewey a majority in the Electoral College. (The final count gave Truman 303 electoral votes, Dewey 189, and Thurmond 39.) The Democrats also handily reclaimed both houses of Congress: gaining majorities of 54 to 42 in the Senate, 263 to 171 in the House.

The journalistic post-mortems, of course, featured the eating of crow. The Alsop brothers, columnists Stewart and Joseph, asked that theirs be fricasseed. The pollsters were red-faced. One of their big errors: ignoring the “undecided” voters.

What group of voters had proved decisive?

“Labor did it,” were Truman’s first words when he walked into the Hotel Muehlebach in Kansas City, Missouri, on the morning after the election. Taft-Hartley, whatever its worth as legislation, was noxious political medicine for the Republicans. Labor union cadres worked hard to get Democratic voters to the polls, accomplishing what the weakened big-city political machines were increasingly unable to do. But labor’s power, too, was limited. Truman lost four of the biggest industrial states to Dewey—New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and New Jersey. Thereafter, as union militancy (and, later, membership) declined, the “labor vote” would become increasingly fragmented.

One of the great surprises of the election was Truman’s victory in such Republican Corn Belt states as Iowa and Ohio. The storage bin issue helped him, as did his seemingly anachronistic whistle-stop campaigning in Ottawa, Fostoria, and other small towns in Ohio and elsewhere. The 1948 election may have signaled the last decisive vote by farmers, then 17 percent of the population (but only two percent today).

Journalist Samuel Lubell, writing four years after the election, ar-



Twenty years after Truman’s 1945 plea for national health insurance, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Medicare (for the elderly) into law in Independence, Mo. Truman and Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey help out.

gued persuasively that, contrary to most predictions, the Thurmond and Wallace campaigns actually helped elect Truman. Reaction to the Dixiecrat specter stirred black (and Jewish) voters to turn out and pull the Democratic lever. "Negroes felt if they didn't support Truman, no other politician would ever defy the Southerners again," one Harlem editor told Lubell. Truman's appeal among big-city Catholics, meanwhile, burgeoned in reaction to Wallace's acceptance of Communist support. According to Lubell, Catholics voted in great numbers in 1948 (a year of generally low turnout), and those in many Boston wards and several other locales gave even more votes to Truman than they had given to FDR or to Al Smith, one of their own, 20 years earlier.

The Checkered Future

The truth may be that no single group of voters put Truman over the top. The election was too close, there were too many "what ifs." This much is clear. Truman did manage to accomplish his goal: He rallied a sufficient remnant of FDR's New Deal coalition of farmers, union workers, blacks, poor Southern whites, and Northern liberals.

But the narrow margin of victory showed how difficult that task had now become.

Indeed, in 1952, beset by a Red Scare and an unpopular war in Korea, Truman would choose not to run for a second full term, in part because he saw that he would need to repeat the 1948 miracle. The Democratic candidate that year, Illinois' liberal governor, Adlai Stevenson, was swamped by the G.O.P.'s Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Republicans' assault on Truman's record—"Korea, Communism, and Corruption," or $K_1 C_2$. The Illinois Democrat, who soft-pedaled civil rights, carried nine Southern and border states (and none elsewhere in the country), but Ike took Florida, Texas, Virginia, and Oklahoma. When Stevenson tried again in 1956, Eisenhower's margin of victory grew.

The Republicans, it should be noted, were not able to translate the frailties of the national Democratic Party into sweeping gains in state and local elections. Only briefly, during 1953–55, did the G.O.P. control both houses of Congress. And the retirement of Eisenhower, who enjoyed vast *personal* popularity, helped the Democrats. Stirring his fellow Catholics, John F. Kennedy would narrowly win one for the Democrats in 1960, and President Lyndon B. Johnson would overwhelm Senator Barry Goldwater, a conservative Republican, in 1964.

But these Democratic victories did not permanently heal the divisions that first split the national party in 1948.

In 1968, amid turmoil over race relations and Vietnam, the Solid South finally fell apart. Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, the liberal hero of 1948, carried only Texas in the Old Confederacy in his ill-starred race against the Republicans' Richard M. Nixon, and against George C. Wallace of Alabama, candidate of the American Independent Party.

Thereafter, no Democratic nominee could *count* on Southern votes.

The left-center ideological gap that Henry Wallace opened among Democrats over issues of "peace" and coping with Communist advances overseas closed up under the Korean War's impact, only to reappear in more painful form during the Vietnam conflict. In 1972, Wallace's spiritual heir, George McGovern, captured the Democratic nomination on a "peace" platform; he lost every state but Massachusetts (and the District of Columbia) to Richard Nixon. Ever since, the national party has been at war with itself, as liberal Northerners have vied with moderate Southerners for control of the party.

Even as the Democrats' party organization (and, to a lesser extent, the Republicans') began to weaken four decades ago, voters' partisan loyalties began to fade. "Independent" voters, who constituted perhaps 20 percent of the electorate in 1948, now account for 30 percent of the total. Every presidential candidate, especially every Democrat, today must assemble an entire national electoral coalition anew. Black Americans still vote Democratic; but virtually every other voter seems to be up for grabs: In 1980, Ronald Reagan, a conservative California Republican running against Jimmy Carter of Georgia, managed to capture all of the South except Carter's home state, as well as nearly half the votes of all union members.

Higher levels of education and affluence, especially in the South, explain some of the erosion of party loyalty. In the growing white suburbs of Atlanta, Dallas, and Orlando, sons and daughters of lifelong Democrats now sometimes do the unthinkable and vote Republican; in the North, middle-class Protestants are no longer moored to the G.O.P.

Equally important has been the transformation of the business of politics. In 1948, as during the previous 75 years, Americans could expect to find a dutiful party worker on the doorstep, asking for votes; but during the *next* presidential campaign, the candidates themselves were coming right into voters' living rooms via television.

When a newsman asked Truman, in a post-election news conference, whether TV coverage had influenced the outcome, the other print journalists present laughed out loud. Truman said that he wished that it had. However, just four years later, an estimated 60 million TV viewers watched Richard M. Nixon's famed "Checkers" speech; the California representative's emotional response to charges that he maintained a campaign slush fund sparked an outpouring of public support that persuaded Dwight Eisenhower to keep him on the G.O.P. ticket as his running mate. Not always in such obvious ways, television after 1948 would alter forever the course of American politics and shape the destinies of individual politicians seeking higher office.
