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HARRY S. TRUMAN: AN EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION  
OF HIS USE OF ETHICAL APPEAL IN  
SELECTED SPEECHES FROM THE  
1948 PRESIDENTIAL  
CAMPAIGN

THESIS

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By

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The study begins with an overview of the 1948 political situation, followed by the evaluation of Truman's use of ethical appeal using criteria developed by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden. Each of their three constituents of ethical appeal--character, sagacity, and good will--is applied to four speeches. Results of the analysis establish that Truman utilized a strong ethical appeal during the campaign.

Conclusions are that his use of ethical appeal probably had a significant effect on the voters of America. Regardless of the quality of his use of pathos or logos, a less capable use of ethical appeal would probably have had a fatal effect on his campaign.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Few events in the history of American politics have been as perplexing--and surprising--as the 1948 Presidential election. The election and its candidates have been the subjects of countless books and articles, considerable discussion, and red-faced embarrassment on the part of pollsters. Judging from nearly every available means of prediction, Thomas E. Dewey was supposed to win the election. Throughout the campaign, he knew it, both political parties knew it, and the American news media knew it. The problem, from Dewey's point of view, was that Harry Truman and the American voters did not know it.

Everything was against Truman: the polls, the news media, even members of his own party. Financial security did not exist; at one point, it was thought the campaign would have to be terminated because there was no more money.<sup>1</sup> In spite of all the problems he had to overcome, Truman still won the election. The obvious question is, "Why?" What factors manifested themselves in the course of the campaign to persuade the American voters that Truman, and not Dewey, should serve as President of the United States?

Since the election, countless answers have been given to that question. One contention is that Truman won on the

strength of his own merit. Following the election, Time magazine stated that the voters had chosen him "for a number of reasons, not the least of which was little old Harry Truman."<sup>2</sup> Susan M. Hartmann, in her book Truman and the 80th Congress, maintains that "the basic reason for Truman's victory was . . . Truman himself."<sup>3</sup>

The authors used different words to express an identical point of view: Truman's ethical appeal, his image in the eyes of the voters, was an important factor in winning the election. Certainly other factors influenced the voters; however, this study does not focus on them, but is limited to Truman's use of ethical appeal.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine and evaluate Truman's use of ethical appeal utilized in selected speeches during the 1948 campaign.

#### Previous Works in the Field

Studies of ethos and its implementation are not new. Examples of theses and dissertations, all analyzing the ethical appeal of a given speaker, include: "A Critical Study in Ethos: Cedric Adams, Newscaster-Columnist," by Benedict Edward Hardman;<sup>4</sup> "An Analysis of Alexander Campbell's Ethos in the Debate with Robert Owen, April 13, 1829," by Russell Bryant;<sup>5</sup> "An Analysis of the Use of Ethos in the Reform Speeches of Joseph Chamberlain between 1876 and 1886," by Joseph David Ceasar.<sup>6</sup> Other examples include

"Ethos in the International Crisis Speaking of John Fitzgerald Kennedy," by Lauren R. Wheelless,<sup>7</sup> and "Ethos or 'Image' in Contemporary Persuasion, with Particular Reference to Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964," by Jane Delson.<sup>8</sup>

### Criteria

The criteria chosen for the evaluative section of the study have been developed by Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird, and Waldo W. Braden in their book Speech Criticism. The application of the criteria will observe the Aristotelian constituents of ethical appeal: "character, sagacity, and good will."<sup>9</sup>

In order to believe that a speaker has good character, "the audience must be convinced that a speaker is virtuous."<sup>10</sup> The following questions may be applied to a speaker for the purpose of determining his virtue and character:

1. Does he associate himself or his message with what is virtuous or elevated?
2. Does he bestow tempered praise upon himself and his cause?
3. Does he link the opponent or the opponent's cause with what is not virtuous?
4. Does he remove or minimize unfavorable impressions of himself or his cause previously established by his opponent?
5. Does he rely upon authority derived from his personal experience?
6. Does he create the impression of being completely sincere?<sup>11</sup>

The speaker demonstrates sagacity, according to Aristotle, "if he handles his materials in such a way as to demonstrate intellectual integrity and wisdom." Furthermore, the speaker must be "consistent and logical in his inferences

from causal reasoning, specific instances, analogies, . . . and handling of evidence."<sup>12</sup> Sagacity may be determined by asking:

1. Does he use what is popularly called "common sense?"
2. Does he act with tact and moderation?
3. Does he display a sense of good taste?
4. Does he have a broad familiarity with the interests of the day?
5. Does he show, through the use of his speech materials, that he is possessed of intellectual integrity and wisdom?<sup>13</sup>

To demonstrate good will, the third component of ethical proof, "the speaker must know his audience so that he can present himself as a friend to what they consider good, an enemy to what they consider evil. He must present himself as one who has done some good service to them or to their close friends."<sup>14</sup> Good will may be determined by asking:

1. Does he capture the proper balance between too much and too little praise of his audience?
2. Does he identify himself with the listeners and their problems?
3. Does he proceed with candor and straightforwardness?
4. Does he offer necessary rebukes with tact and consideration?
5. Does he offset any personal reasons he may have for giving the speech?
6. Does he reveal without exhibitionism his personable qualities as a messenger of the truth?<sup>15</sup>

It is axiomatic that any speaker will employ certain ethical appeals to which any or all of the criteria may be applied. However, this study is concerned with Harry Truman, a unique speaker in a unique situation. While each criterion has potential validity and importance, they are not all applicable to a single rhetorical act; it is therefore reasonable that several of the criteria may, in the course of the evaluation, be eliminated.

## Procedure

The design of the study is as follows. Chapter II highlights the political situation throughout 1948. Included is an analysis of Truman's unpopularity, an analysis of the other candidates, and the resultant campaign strategy. Chapter III applies the chosen criteria to Truman's speaking. Accordingly, it is divided into three sections: character, sagacity, and good will. Four speeches have been chosen for this purpose:

1. "Labor Must Have a Friendly Administration and Congress," delivered on Labor Day, 1948, in Detroit.<sup>16</sup>
2. The major address delivered on September 18, 1948, at the National Plowing Contest in Dexter, Iowa.<sup>17</sup>
3. The "Whistle-Stop" speech given in El Paso, Texas on September 25, 1948.<sup>18</sup>
4. The "Whistle-Stop" speech given in Bonham, Texas on September 27, 1948.<sup>19</sup>

These speeches have been chosen for study for the following reasons: (1) they represent different geographical locations; (2) they represent different audiences having different interests; (3) two are major addresses scheduled and planned well in advance, while two are "Whistle-Stop" speeches, more extemporaneous and informal in nature.

The final chapter examines those elements of Truman's ethical appeal which are not categorized by the criteria. Furthermore, it delineates the conclusions reached as a result of the research.

Primary sources for the study include The New York Times, Newsweek, Time, and U. S. News and World Report, in addition to

other periodicals of the day. Books devoted to the Truman era, especially The Truman Presidency by Cabell Phillips, The Man From Missouri by Alfred Steinberg, and Jules Abels' Out of the Jaws of Victory, are also primary sources, as are the biographies Harry S. Truman by Margaret Truman and Plain Speaking by Merle Miller. Finally, Truman's own writings, especially his Memoirs, provide valuable firsthand accounts of the political situation of 1948.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Merle Miller, Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman (New York: Berkley Publishing Corp., 1974), p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>"Independence Day," Time, 8 November 1948, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Susan M. Hartmann, Truman and the 80th Congress, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1971), p. 210.

<sup>4</sup>"Graduate Theses: An Index of Graduate Research in Speech and Cognate Fields," Speech Monographs, 36 (August, 1969), 352.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>"Graduate Theses: An Index of Graduate Research in Speech," Speech Monographs, 35 (August, 1968), 362.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>9</sup>Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird, and Waldo W. Braden, Speech Criticism, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1970), p. 458.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 458-459.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 459-460.

<sup>16</sup>Harry S. Truman, "Labor Must Have a Friendly Administration and Congress," Vital Speeches of the Day, 15 September 1948, p. 712.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, 19 September 1948, Sec. 1, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>New York Times, 26 September 1948, Sec. 1, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup>New York Times, 28 September 1948, Sec. 1, p. 20.

## CHAPTER II

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE 1948 POLITICAL SITUATION

#### Truman's Declining Popularity

Nothing came easily to the President in the year 1948, including his party's nomination as the Democratic candidate. A few months earlier, in late 1947, Truman's position had been comfortable, his nomination was considered a certainty, and the polls felt he would be a strong candidate in the upcoming national election. "The Gallop Poll . . . showed that he would defeat the two leading Republicans, Governor Dewey and Senator Taft, by decisive margins."<sup>1</sup> A poll taken just after the New Year asserted that if the Presidential election had been held then, the President would have won.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the election was not held then, and within a short time the situation had completely reversed itself. Four months later, the Truman cause seemed so hopeless that the Democratic party was trying to find another candidate.

The President's decline in popularity began with a series of minor incidents. While no one of them was potentially disastrous, together they created an uncomfortable situation for him. Initially, Truman's State of the Union message on January 7, 1948 was so liberal that he had to overcome some misgivings about delivering it.<sup>3</sup> After settling the questions within himself, however, he wrote in his diary, "Congress

meets--too bad, too. They will do nothing but wrangle. They won't like the address, either."<sup>4</sup>

In the speech, Truman advocated expansion of unemployment compensation and social security with higher benefits, national health insurance, federal aid to education, a large-scale housing program, stronger rent controls, an increase in the minimum wage, and a decrease in taxes for low-income families while increasing corporate taxes.<sup>5</sup> Although these were all New Deal objectives, the impact of pulling all of them together at one time was awesome.

The speech was met with silence from all but the most liberal Democrats, who applauded it loudly. Republicans, however, did not hesitate to unleash sharp attacks. House Majority Whip Leslie Arends, Majority Leader Charles Halleck, and Senate policy leader Robert Taft all expressed harsh reaction to the President's speech. Leading newspapers, including the New York Times and the Washington Post, were equally strong in their attacks.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after the State of the Union message, Truman alienated Northern Democrats when he failed to reinstate James M. Landis, an old friend of Roosevelt, as head of the Civil Aeronautics Board. A few weeks later, he replaced Marriner S. Eccles as Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors with a Republican, Thomas McCabe. Both of these men were original New Dealers; their dismissal was viewed by other liberals as Truman's effort to do away with the backers of the New Deal remaining in government.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the President was subjected to an investigation in the area of commodities-speculation. In October of 1947, he had asked the Congress for the power to control the commodity exchanges in order to prevent grain speculators from bidding up food prices. Three months later, the Senate Appropriations Committee learned that Edwin W. Pauley, close personal friend of Truman and special assistant to the Secretary of the Army and Brigadier General Wallace Graham, the President's personal physician, had both earned substantial sums of money as grain speculators. The implication that Truman had helped his friends attain their wealth was never proven, but proof was unnecessary--the damage had been done.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, Truman's foreign policy toward Palestine and the Middle East was creating further dissension and bitterness. Throughout his political career, Truman had supported the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. His basis for this support was the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the British document which advocated the creation of Israel.<sup>9</sup> In November, 1947, the United Nations formulated a plan, supported by the United States and Truman, to divide Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Arab reaction was strong and swift; the Arab League announced that its member nations were moving troops to the Palestine border.<sup>10</sup>

The decision to partition created a furor at home as well as abroad. Extreme Zionists exerted pressure on the White House, wanting Truman to "stop the Arabs, to keep the British from supporting the Arabs, to furnish American soldiers, to do

this, that, and the other."<sup>11</sup> Pressure also came from a group led by Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, who argued that support of the partition endangered Arab relations, and that without Middle Eastern oil, failure of the Marshall Plan and the American economy were imminent.<sup>12</sup> Forrestal argued further that the Soviets had also voted for partition; consequently, their troops would come into the Mid-East, and their presence in the oil fields would be a dangerous thing. According to Forrestal, the alternative was a retreat from the position supporting partition to adoption of a policy calling for the establishment of a temporary trusteeship in Palestine.<sup>13</sup> Although Truman opposed this policy, in mid-March he finally backed the trusteeship proposal, adding that "this did not mean rejection of partition but merely that it had been postponed."<sup>14</sup>

The reaction to the new policy was shattering, as liberals and Jews across the country denounced Truman for abandoning their cause. Eleanor Roosevelt wanted to resign as U. N. delegate; Dorothy Schiff, owner of the New York Post, refused to support him in the election because of his shiftiness on this question;<sup>15</sup> Democratic leaders in New York, Illinois, and Florida withdrew their support.<sup>16</sup>

The final blow to Truman's popularity came in the form of his stand on the civil rights issue. In his State of the Union message, the President had announced that he would soon release his recommendations for civil rights legislation. Four weeks later, on February 2, Truman sent a message to Congress

containing a liberal civil rights program. The message was based on recommendations from the Presidential Committee on Civil Rights which Truman had established in December, 1946. It included "a permanent commission on civil rights . . . , legislation to protect the right to vote, to outlaw lynching, the poll tax, and segregation in interstate commerce and . . . the establishment of a Federal Employment Practices Commission similar to that which had operated during the war."<sup>17</sup> Truman also called for measures to end discrimination in the civil service and to do away with segregation in the armed services.<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly this was the most far-reaching program of its kind,<sup>19</sup> and national reaction immediately bore this out.

Although liberals across the country greeted the program with praise, Southern reaction was one of wild outrage.<sup>20</sup> Senator Russell and Representative Cox, both of Georgia, Senator Connally of Texas,<sup>21</sup> and Senator Eastland of Mississippi<sup>22</sup> all expressed angry, bitter reaction. A total of fifty-two Southern Congressmen expressed their complete disapproval by adopting a resolution condemning the civil rights program.<sup>23</sup>

Truman had known the program would cause repercussions in the Southern faction. He hoped, however, feelings would cool before time for the national convention in July. Such was not the case. A six-man delegation of Southern governors, headed by Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, approached the President. Their intention, according to Cabell Phillips, was "to plumb the true depth and meaning of this assault on Southern Democracy."<sup>24</sup> Truman's answer to them is indicative of a man who will not compromise himself:

My forebears were Confederates. I come from a part of the country where Jim Crowism is as prevalent as it is in New York or Washington. Every factor and influence in my background--and in my wife's for that matter--would foster the personal belief that you are right.

But my very stomach turned over when I learned that Negro soldiers, just back from overseas, were being dumped out of army trucks in Mississippi and beaten.

Whatever my inclinations as a native of Missouri might have been, as President I know this is bad. I shall fight to end evils like this.<sup>25</sup>

Southern resentment to the President's answer was strong.

In May, 1948, a conference of States' Rights Democrats was held in Jackson, Mississippi, attracting nearly one thousand people from seven Deep South States.<sup>26</sup> The States' Righters had as a common goal to stop Truman, and they developed a strategy to accomplish it:

The consensus was, first, to try to block Truman's nomination with a convention bolt to a Southerner. . . . In the probable event of the failure of this tactic, they would call a separate convention . . . immediately after the regular Democratic convention to field a slate of 'true' Democratic candidates. By this strategem, . . . neither Truman nor his Republican opponent could get a majority of the electoral vote, and the issue would be thrown into the House of Representatives. Then, with each state having but a single vote and the Southerners holding the balance of power, they could dictate their choice of a Democratic President.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the most long-lasting result of the meeting was the coining of the word "Dixiecrat" by a newspaper editor in Charlotte, North Carolina, who needed to abbreviate States' Rights Democratic Party.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of 1948, Truman and the Democrats held a distinct advantage over the GOP. He was certain of his party's nomination and probable re-election, and the Democratic Party apparently was destined to regain many of the

Congressional seats lost in the 1946 elections. The comfort and security did not last long, however, as Truman's popularity sank in four months' time from a healthy 52 or 53 per cent<sup>29</sup> in January to a nadir of 36 per cent.<sup>30</sup>

The primary reasons for the sudden decline began with a series of minor incidents that included an extremely liberal State of the Union message, failure to reinstate two long-time New Dealers to important posts, and an investigation in the area of commodities-speculation. Following these, the Palestine issue created a large furor from people on both sides. Finally, the presentation of Truman's civil rights package created further dissension by alienating Southern Democrats, thereby raising questions as to how solid the "Solid South" really was.

The dramatic results of these events may be seen in the effects they had upon the Democratic party. The first is described by Truman:

Although many candidates for the presidency have had to cope with splits within their parties, the situation which I faced in 1948 was without comparable precedent in the history of American politics. I was confronted not with one defection in the Democratic party but with two bolts of sizeable proportions.<sup>31</sup>

The first came on December 28, 1947, when Henry A. Wallace announced the formation of the Progressive party. Wallace had enjoyed considerable popularity as a Vice-President under Franklin Roosevelt;<sup>32</sup> consequently, his potential as a vote-getter was not to be discounted. Truman believed that Wallace "cherished an idealistic notion that he would be able to stir up a

following in the country that could elect him President. The creation of the Progressive party in 1948 was an attempt . . . to materialize that aspiration."<sup>33</sup> Because of his idealism, Wallace did not realize that many of his followers were Communists. Indeed, late in the campaign he was endorsed by Radio Moscow as being "the best candidate."<sup>34</sup> Truman summed up his feelings toward Wallace by saying, "I realized that the Progressives would cost me votes, but . . . they stood for principles which I knew I must reject."<sup>35</sup>

The second defection from the Democratic party was led by the Southern faction. Although they had named themselves "Dixiecrats," they had done little real harm to the Democratic party--until the convention was held. The platform committee met in mid-week to decide where the party would stand on the delicate civil rights issues. Most members wanted to adopt the vague, ambiguous plank from the previous platform, hoping to appease the Southern delegates. However, a small group of liberals, led by Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey of Minneapolis, fought for a point by point adoption of the program proposed by Truman.<sup>36</sup>

When the issue finally went to the floor for a delegate vote, the Humphrey forces won by a margin of 651 1/2 to 582 1/2.

When the result was announced, all of the Mississippi delegation and half of those from Alabama rose from their seats, . . . and strode from the hall and into the pouring rain outside. . . .<sup>37</sup>

Although the Dixiecrat walk-out was not as strongly supported by Southerners as expected, the separation in the Democratic

party was nonetheless emphasized. In accordance with the strategy drawn up at the meeting in Jackson, the Dixiecrats held their own convention three days later. The ticket they chose was headed by J. Strom Thurmond, with Fielding L. Wright, Governor of Mississippi, as the Vice-Presidential nominee.<sup>38</sup>

Truman's chances of winning had suddenly been decreased by what appeared to be an insurmountable margin. In describing the rupturing of the Solid South, Cabell Phillips wrote:

This was the vital contingency which Truman had not prepared for. The . . . White House strategy had been built on the assumption that, come what may, the 117 electoral votes of the old Confederacy were in the bag. Now the bag was leaking.<sup>39</sup>

In the spring of 1948, when sentiment against Truman was at its highest, it became obvious that "his candidacy was in jeopardy."<sup>40</sup> His party had already split on the left and was in danger of doing so on the right. Labor, a Democratic tradition, was having second thoughts about voting for "that squeaky-voiced tinhorn."<sup>41</sup>

In desperation, Democrats began looking elsewhere for another candidate. The result was a movement to draft General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower. By late spring, the movement had developed, as Truman described it, "into a full-fledged boom."<sup>42</sup>

Despite two written notices that Eisenhower would not accept the nomination, Democratic party leaders everywhere turned to him. At one point, Eisenhower was even assured of 150 delegate votes at the convention.<sup>43</sup> The snowballing movement finally came to a halt on July 5, one week before the

convention, when Eisenhower stated in a public message that he would not, under any condition, accept the nomination of any political party.<sup>44</sup>

On July 23, U. S. News and World Report reported:

Mr. Truman entered the convention with opposition from three factions. The South was and still is angry about his civil-rights program. New Dealers opposed him. They think Mr. Truman cannot or will not make a real fight for New Deal objectives. Big-city organization leaders were convinced that Mr. Truman could not win. All of these groups urged him to withdraw in favor of General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower.<sup>45</sup>

However, Eisenhower's refusal made Truman's nomination a certainty. James A. Hagerty concurred in the New York Times: "With the collapse of the opposition to the nomination of President Truman because of the refusal of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower to run if nominated . . . , the Truman forces today took complete command of the situation."<sup>46</sup>

Truman's nomination finally was unobstructed. When the time came for the delegate vote, he won easily on the first ballot. Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky won the Vice-Presidential nomination by acclamation. However, the real struggle was still ahead, and the President knew it:

I realized, of course, that the boom for Eisenhower and the defections of the Progressives and the States' Righters would cut into my voting strength on Election Day. But I knew that it was my duty to carry forward the program that had taken the nation from the depths of the depression to prosperity and world leadership, and I was convinced that the American people would want to have it carried forward--if only they were given the facts. And these I was determined to give them.<sup>47</sup>

The President's optimism was probably the most positive outlook the Democratic party had.

The strength of opinion against him was staggering; that nearly every poll chose his opponent is axiomatic. To realize the full impact of what Truman had to face, an examination of the surveys is in order.

The three major polls were giving Thomas E. Dewey such an advantage that Republican National Chairman Hugh Scott felt it necessary to warn his party that "overconfidence can lose an election."<sup>48</sup> In mid-September George Gallup predicted Dewey would receive 48 1/2 per cent of the vote to Truman's 36 1/2 per cent. With 266 electoral votes needed for election, Archibald Crossley's poll gave Dewey at least 304 and up to 397, while Truman was given only 106.<sup>49</sup> Pollster Elmer Roper decided that "the election was as good as won before the campaign had even started,"<sup>50</sup> announcing therefore that he would stop reporting his pre-election polls. His figures: Dewey 44.2 per cent, Truman 31.4, Thurmond 4.4, Wallace 3.6 and others and undecided 16.4.<sup>51</sup>

The three major polls were not alone in their choice of Dewey. The survey taken by U. S. News and World Report disclosed that "Thomas E. Dewey is to win and Harry Truman to lose the Presidency on November 2 by a big margin of electoral votes. . . . Mr. Dewey is assured of 322 electoral votes on the basis of opinion polls and of surveys made by political editors of U. S. News and World Report."<sup>52</sup>

At considerable expense to themselves, the New York Times "deployed a small battalion of reporters across the country for an entire month to take the national pulse."<sup>53</sup> The first report,

on October 4, indicated that Dewey would carry fourteen of twenty Western states.<sup>54</sup> A more comprehensive survey was published by the Times on October 18. Those results gave Dewey twenty-seven states with 333 electoral votes and Truman nine states with 82 electoral votes, leaving eight states with 78 electoral votes in doubt.<sup>55</sup> The October 25 edition reported:

With only eight days to go before the election on Nov. 2, Thomas E. Dewey and Earl Warren . . . appear certain to defeat President Harry S. Truman and Senator Alben W. Barkley . . . by a large plurality in the Electoral college.

These are the conclusions to be drawn from correspondents from the New York Times in all states in which election results are doubtful.<sup>56</sup>

Their final poll was published on October 31. Its findings: "Dewey 29 states with 345 electoral votes; Truman, 11 states with 105 electoral votes; Thurmond, 4 states with 38 electoral votes; the rest 'in doubt'."<sup>57</sup> According to this poll, then, Truman's status had improved very little since October 18.

As early as April Truman was considered defeated. At a convention of newspaper publishers and editors held in mid-April, consensus was nearly unanimous that, regardless of who their nominee was, the Republicans were expected to win.<sup>58</sup> In early June, the fifty Washington newspaper correspondents unanimously predicted a Republican victory. While this group had been expressing their opinions for years, it was the first time in their history they had ever agreed unanimously on any subject.<sup>59</sup> Other countries even became involved, as Great Britain's ruling party predicted Truman's loss.<sup>60</sup>

A poll released late in October showed Truman had been abandoned by even the college students. Of 3,200 surveyed from seven colleges around the country, 73.9 per cent favored Dewey.<sup>61</sup>

One of the most difficult handicaps Truman had to overcome was the nationwide strength of opinion held against him by the press. Dewey had the support of 771 newspapers, or 65 per cent; Truman's press support was only 182 newspapers, or 15 per cent.<sup>62</sup> While newspaper after newspaper switched its support from Truman to Dewey, not one changed from Dewey to Truman.<sup>63</sup>

According to the polls, many traditionally Democratic states no longer supported the President. Surveys revealed that Dewey would carry Massachusetts,<sup>64</sup> Colorado,<sup>65</sup> Washington,<sup>66</sup> Ohio,<sup>67</sup> Wisconsin,<sup>68</sup> and Virginia.<sup>69</sup> Election results soon proved the pollsters wrong.<sup>70</sup>

The sampling of surveys presented is not all-inclusive, but only representative of the strength of opinion against Truman. In light of this information, the party splits and movement to draft Eisenhower become less severe. The influence held by the polls was truly incredible. The Republicans had become suddenly optimistic, while the Democrats were understandably forlorn. There seemed to be only one person who placed very little emphasis on the results of the surveys: Harry S. Truman.

I never paid any attention to the polls myself, because in my judgment they did not represent a true cross-section of American opinion. I did not believe that the

major components of society, such as agriculture, management, and labor, were adequately sampled. I also know that the polls did not represent facts but mere speculation, and I have always placed my faith in the known facts.<sup>71</sup>

### The Other Candidates

When Henry A. Wallace first defected from the Democratic party, consensus was that the Progressives would cost Truman his political life.<sup>72</sup> The past history of third parties dictated that Wallace would not win, but it also showed that he had the potential for ruining the Democratic party in 1948.

Wallace's primary point of contention with the Truman Administration rested in the belief that American policy towards the Soviet Union should be softened. He attacked Truman's "get tough" attitude towards Russia: "'Getting tough' never bought anything real and lasting--whether for school-yard bullies or business or world powers."<sup>73</sup> He wanted to establish friendlier relations with the Soviet Union; according to Allen Yarnell, "the key to those friendlier relations was to be a changed attitude on the part of the United States."<sup>74</sup>

The softening of American policy towards Russia was the crux of Wallace's campaign. Domestically he wanted to end racial discrimination and high prices.<sup>75</sup> He also envisioned a world-wide democracy

based on concepts of global full employment and decent minimum standards of living, . . . the destruction of cartels, the removal of trade barriers, equal access to raw materials, a world investment fund, industrialization, and a vast system of public works, including transportation facilities and TVA-style reclamation and development projects.<sup>76</sup>

Wallace's appeal was restricted. Generally, the people at his rallies were predominantly working class, with a heavy representation of Negroes. In addition, there was almost always a heavy turnout of youngsters of the college or GI set.<sup>77</sup>

As Wallace's campaign crossed the country, the number of Communist followers grew. Realizing a good opportunity when they saw it, "Democratic strategists did their . . . best to fix the Communist label on Wallace."<sup>78</sup> Their strategy was successful; with the arrival of election day, the base of Wallace's support had shrunk to a core of radical left-wingers with a strongly Communist orientation.<sup>79</sup>

Despite Wallace's growing unpopularity, the Democrats believed that the Progressive party made Truman's election virtually impossible.<sup>80</sup> However, the final results proved this to be untrue. Wallace received less than 1,200,000 votes, most of which would have gone to Truman had Wallace not been on the ballot. While the President did not need the votes Wallace received, there is no doubt that the Progressive candidate prevented Truman from carrying New York, Maryland, Michigan,<sup>81</sup> and possibly New Jersey.<sup>82</sup> Undoubtedly his absence from the ballot would have simplified the President's task.

Wallace and the Progressives represented the extreme left wing; Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrats represented the extreme right. Wallace split from the party because he honestly believed friendlier relations with the Soviet Union were necessary.

The Dixiecrats defected because their prejudices would not allow them to agree with the President. John Fenton confirms:

That this revolt should be sparked by a civil rights program sponsored by Truman--a former border-state Senator with a generally safe record on this issue as far as the South was concerned--serves to confirm the fact that the Dixiecrats . . . were protesting much more about the policies of President Truman than about the policies of the Democratic party.<sup>83</sup>

The platform written by the Dixiecrats was in favor of "the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race,"<sup>84</sup> even though there was no mention of "white supremacy."<sup>85</sup> When Thurmond accepted the nomination, he said, "We believe that there are not enough troops in the Army to force the Southern people to admit the Negroes into our theatres, swimming pools, and homes. . . . If the South should vote for Truman this year, we might as well petition the government for colonial status."<sup>86</sup>

Although predictions for Wallace's strength had been high, it was Thurmond and the Dixiecrats who did the most damage to the President. The 1,168,000 popular votes they received took the 38 electoral votes of South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana away from Harry Truman.<sup>87</sup> Had the Dixiecrats not defected, those votes would have gone to him, and the President's victory would have been all the more decisive.<sup>88</sup>

Of course Truman's real competition came not from the splits within his own party, but from Thomas E. Dewey, Governor of New York and Republican nominee for the Presidential

election. Dewey had run against Roosevelt in 1944, and in spite of his loss, he had made an excellent showing. In fact, the 1944 election was the closest since 1916.<sup>89</sup>

Dewey conducted a very smooth, highly organized, abundantly financed campaign.<sup>90</sup> The Dewey advisers were extremely confident of victory, so they chose a campaign strategy designed to maintain the status quo. In Susan Hartmann's words, "Since Dewey was ahead, the best course was to attempt to maintain his lead and not risk antagonizing various groups by discussing issues."<sup>91</sup> Choosing national unity as the real issue of the campaign,<sup>92</sup> his strongest promise may have been to "restore unity, teamwork, integrity, and competence to government."<sup>93</sup> With such unexciting rhetoric, the watchwords of the campaign quickly became "blandness, platitudes, homilies."<sup>94</sup>

Dewey's personal beliefs were really liberal. "As a progressive, Dewey's ideas on foreign policy, minimum wages, public housing, and economic controls came a great deal closer to Truman than they did to . . . GOP fundamentalists. . . ."<sup>95</sup> However, to make his position on these issues publicly known would have been to contradict his campaign strategy. John Fenton, editor of the Gallup poll, discovered that Dewey's failure to take a stand on the issues undoubtedly hurt him, because "about one voter in four said he just didn't know enough about the New York Governor to say anything about him."<sup>96</sup>

Truman took a very dim view of Dewey's failure to take a stand on the issues. After the Republican nominee had delivered an unusually vague speech, Truman retorted,

This soft talk and double talk, this combination of crafty silence and resounding misrepresentation, is an insult to the intelligence of the American voter. It proceeds upon the assumption that you can fool all the people--or enough of them--all the time.<sup>97</sup>

Dewey did not command a dynamic public image; he gave the impression of being cold and calculating, even ruthless. One popular cartoonist depicted him as a robot-like computer with a human head--certainly not the ideal image for a politician. Finally, a post-election survey revealed that many voters considered him patronizing, superior, and cold.<sup>98</sup>

At exactly what point in the campaign Dewey fell behind his opponent is not clear. General consensus, however, indicates that the New York Governor was in danger about two weeks before election day. Cabell Phillips described the situation metaphorically: ". . . when the first turbulence of a Truman tide began to appear late in October, the Dewey crew, geared for smooth water only, were unable to trim sails in order to meet the rising seas."<sup>99</sup>

#### The Resultant Campaign Strategy

Although there were many controlling factors in the election, Cabell Phillips asserts that the primary one was this: "Truman had . . . a basic campaign strategy that was unique to his needs and to his capacities, and he stuck with it. . . . He did not deviate essentially from his master plan throughout the campaign. The result was that he knew what he was doing every step of the way."<sup>100</sup>

Truman's campaign strategy consisted primarily of three elements. The first was a forty-three page memorandum entitled "The Politics of 1948" by special counsel Clark Clifford. Presented to Truman in mid-November, 1947, it included an analysis of what the 1948 political situation would probably be and an outline of the action which the President should take to win the election.<sup>101</sup>

The first part was entitled "The Probabilities." Included as "probabilities" were Dewey's nomination, the formation of Wallace's third party, and the formation of the state of Israel. In the event of Israel's independence, Clifford urged immediate recognition of the new country. He also examined the importance of voting blocs, minorities, and foreign policy, especially with the Soviets. Furthermore, the first part dealt with domestic policy, pointing out that the most controversial issue would be the high cost of living. The section ended with a discussion of the relations between the President and the Congress. Clifford believed that Truman must be firm with Congress, unwilling to compromise himself on the programs he wanted. This had been the strategy of his veto of the Taft-Hartley Bill, and it had paid off for him.<sup>102</sup>

The second part of the memorandum, "The Course of Action," was concerned with "the political level" and "the program level." At the political level, Clifford urged bringing in new faces to rebuild and unify the party, establishing friendlier relations with labor leaders by inviting them to the White House for individual visits, and undermining Henry Wallace's

liberalism by a slight move to the left. Clifford also hinted at discrediting the Progressive candidate by associating him with the Communists. This action was later done for him by the Americans for Democratic Action, an independent group who wanted to ensure that Wallace would not harm the image of American liberalism.<sup>103</sup>

The program level was the final part of the memorandum. Clifford believed that the upcoming State of the Union message could be used as a strong weapon by Truman. In reference to the programs he would present in it, Clifford said,

There is little possibility that he will get much cooperation from the Congress but we want the President to be in a position to receive the credit for whatever they do accomplish while also being in position to criticize the Congress for being obstructionists in failing to comply with other recommendations. This will be a fertile field for the development of campaign issues.<sup>104</sup>

Clifford's words were more prophetic than he could have known: the Republican party was to become Truman's scapegoat for nearly every malady from which the country was suffering. Clifford identified the concrete issues in the campaign:

"(1) High Prices; (2) Housing; (3) The Marshall Plan; (4) Tax Revision; (5) Conservation of Natural Resources in the West; and (6) Civil Rights,"<sup>105</sup> urging the President to take a strong stand on each and outlining possible action to achieve it.

The Clifford memorandum had one major flaw: Truman's special counsel assumed that, come what may, the Solid South would maintain its Democratic tradition. Had he foreseen this split, Clifford's advice on civil rights might have been

less liberal. Nonetheless, the memorandum was an outstanding example of insightful political analysis, and it formed the foundation for Truman's political actions in 1946. One important aspect of the memorandum was its timeliness. When Clifford submitted it, Truman was seriously considering allowing the nomination to go to another Democrat. Although the memorandum did not promise the President he could win, it did make the apparently-insurmountable problems more realistic, thereby convincing Truman that victory was, indeed, within the realm of possibility. In short, "the Clifford memo provided Truman with a practical rationale and a strategy to underpin his natural impulse. It resolved whatever misgivings he was still harboring as 1947 drew to a close and the year of decision dawned, And its traces are strikingly evident in all that he did subsequently."<sup>106</sup>

The second element of the campaign strategy took place at the Democratic convention in mid-July. Life magazine reported that shortly after his nomination, "President Truman did the damndest thing of all. Delivering his acceptance speech at the unprecedented hour of two in the morning, he amazed everybody by making one of the most surprising long-short gambles in U. S. political history."<sup>107</sup> Near the end of the speech, he said:

On the twenty-sixth 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.

At the same time, I shall ask them to act upon other vitally needed measures, such as aid to education, which they say they are for; a national health program; civil rights legislation, which they say they are for; an increase in the minimum wage, which I doubt very much they are for; extension of the Social Security coverage and increased benefits, which they say they are for; for funds for projects needed in our program to provide public power and cheap electricity. . . .

I shall ask for adequate and decent laws for displaced persons in place of this anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic law which this Eightieth Congress passed.

Now my friend, if there is any reality behind that Republican platform, we ought to get some action from a short session of the Eightieth Congress. They can do this job in fifteen days if they want to do it. They will still have time to go out and run for office.<sup>108</sup>

Of course the Republicans were furious at such an audacious exercise of Presidential power; that Truman was playing politics at the expense of Congress was clearly evident.

Nonetheless, the "Turnip Day" special session was considered a stroke of political genius, because it focused on the inadequacies of the Eightieth Congress. It put the Republicans in the uncomfortable position of having to prove that they meant what they had said in their platform.<sup>109</sup>

The special session lasted only twelve days. Although the program submitted by Truman contained many items endorsed in the Republican platform, the legislative results of the "Turnip Day" session were meager at best. "Truman conceded later that he knew the session would be fruitless as far as legislation was concerned--as it was, of course--and he justified it solely on the grounds of calling the Republicans' bluff."<sup>110</sup> The failure of the Republican-dominated Congress to produce any valuable legislation provided powerful ammunition

and gave some badly-needed momentum to the struggling Truman campaign.

The final element in Truman's campaign strategy was the "Whistle-Stop" tour. A preliminary tour, taken in early June, 1948, was supposedly non-political. Its original purpose was the delivery of the commencement address at the Berkeley campus of the University of California; however, upon returning to Washington fifteen days later, he had spoken at seventy-six cities, towns, and villages along the way.<sup>111</sup>

Strategically the trip was very important. Late spring was the height of Truman's unpopularity, according to the polls. "While all the machinations of the left, right, and center were monopolizing the newspaper, he had a hunch that 'everybody was against me except the people.' He wanted to test that hunch. If it proved out, he would go the whole course to try to win the election."<sup>112</sup> In the face of the gloom and pessimism being spread, Truman felt that this "was the only alternative" he had.<sup>113</sup>

Of the seventy-six speeches, seventy-one were "off the cuff." "I used notes sometimes to adapt my statements to local interests, but these were never more than a few lines and were usually handed to me only a minute or so before I began speaking."<sup>114</sup>

Truman's extemporaneous style was well-received by the people of America. He established a strong rapport with his listeners by speaking in plain, down-to-earth language. He identified with the people, making their concerns his concerns.

The tour was so successful that Truman used it as the format for his political campaign in the fall. Beginning on Labor Day, Truman once again took his case to the people of America. Charles G. Ross, the President's Press Secretary, described the campaign:

It was the President's own idea to wage this kind of fight. There were no deep-laid schemes, no devious plans, nothing that could be called, in the language of the political analysts, 'high strategy.' The President's strategy was to go out all over the country and talk to the people in plain terms about the issues as he saw them.<sup>115</sup>

While the strategy sounds simple, its execution required highly-detailed planning. Truman roughly outlined the campaign in four steps: the Labor Day trip to Michigan; a visit to the West; a trip to the Middle West; and a concentrated effort into the Eastern seaboard.<sup>116</sup>

Because of the uniqueness of the campaign, it drew considerable public attention. In early October, Newsweek magazine published a description of a Whistle-Stop speech:

The pattern at each railroad station was the same: The President began with an off-the-cuff speech from the rear of his Presidential Pullman, the Ferdinand Magellan. Smiling a big smile, he would finish with: 'Now, I'd like to introduce my family. Here comes the boss.' That was the cue for Bess Truman to step out through the dark green curtains across the Pullman's rear door. As the crowd cheered and women 'oh-ed' and 'ah-ed' over her enormous purple orchids, the First Lady grinned happily. Next the President would say: 'Here's the one who bosses her.' Then, out from the wings popped Margaret. Wearing a gracious smile like a veteran trouper, she got the best hand of all, a few wolfish whistles, and a dozen long-stemmed roses. She tossed one of them to photographers as the curtain fell.

The act always went over big. The President invariably carried it off subtly and smoothly. The roles that fell to the women seemed natural and unaffected.<sup>117</sup>

As the campaign continued, optimism began to grow. Few people actually believed Truman could win, but a Dewey landslide was seeming less apparent, and those near the President seemed to take comfort in that. Truman, however, never seemed to doubt that he would win. At one point in the campaign, a reporter asked him how he was feeling. His reply was, "If I felt any better, I couldn't stand it."<sup>118</sup>

Twenty-seven years after the campaign, the Whistle-Stop tour is still exemplary of a unique approach to a challenging situation. According to one critic of the day, the reason the Whistle-Stop method was so popular was because "in this age of stumping by radio, the personal touch has largely gone out of campaigning. Truman . . . tried to put it back. . . . On his first campaign trip he covered 18 states and made 138 speeches in 16 days. On some days he made almost a speech an hour."<sup>119</sup>

That the Whistle-Stop tour was successful cannot be disputed--the election results demonstrate that. In mid-October, Time magazine estimated that he had been seen by about 3,800,000 people,<sup>120</sup> and it was predicted that at least 2,000,000 more would see him in New York City the following week.<sup>121</sup> Years later, the ex-President recalled and philosophized about the campaign:

I made three hundred and fifty-two speeches that were on the record and about the same number that were not. I traveled altogether thirty-one thousand seven hundred miles I believe, and it was the last campaign in which that kind of approach was made, and now, of course, everything is television, and the candidates travel from one place to another by jet airplane, and I don't like that.<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps some of the politicians of today, accustomed to the campaign that keeps the candidate apart from the people, would do well to remember the personalism--and the success--of Harry Truman's Whistle-Stop tour.

## NOTES

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<sup>5</sup>Hamby, p. 212.

<sup>6</sup>Abels, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Steinberg, p. 301.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

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<sup>11</sup>Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, Vol. II of Memoirs (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1956), p. 160.

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<sup>13</sup>Abels, pp. 17-18.

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## CHAPTER III

### AN EVALUATION OF TRUMAN'S USE OF ETHICAL APPEAL IN SELECTED SPEECHES FROM THE CAMPAIGN

In December, 1948, Jennings Randolph, Professor of Public Speaking at Southeastern University, wrote, "Although others may dispute the contention, I thoroughly believe that Mr. Truman tallied a high popular vote because he spoke, and spoke, and spoke to millions of his fellow Americans. . . ." <sup>1</sup> While the number of speeches delivered by Truman might have been influential, to base his election on sheer quantity without lending consideration to quality may be somewhat shortsighted.

As has been established, this study is concerned with one determinant of a speaker's quality: ethical appeal. Certainly the speaker who employs ethical appeals will enjoy a greater degree of success than he might otherwise. Following the format outlined in Chapter I, this chapter evaluates Truman's use of ethical appeal in the speeches selected from the campaign. The evaluation does not purport to be all-encompassing of the 1948 campaign; it should, however, establish a definite trend from which generalizations regarding Truman's ethos during this period may be drawn.

The study begins with an evaluation of his use of "character."

## Character

Of Thonssen, Baird, and Braden's list of six criteria regarding character, question three, linking the opponent's cause to what is not virtuous, emerges as one of the more frequently satisfied. In his Labor Day address, Truman spoke in Detroit before nearly a quarter of a million blue-collar workers and their families.<sup>2</sup> The criterion was met repeatedly throughout the speech, as seen in the following passages:

Glance back over the years. Between 1900 and 1933, labor was dealt three major blows. In each case these blows coincided with depressions, which occurred under Republican Administrations and Republican Congresses.

. . . . .  
The union men with whom I have talked tell me that labor is just beginning to feel the effects of the Taft-Hartley Law. And you and I know that the Taft-Hartley Law is only a foretaste of what you will get if the Republican reaction is allowed to grow.<sup>3</sup>

Although he never used his opponent's name in the address, he did refer constantly to the shortcomings of the Republican party. Given the circumstances, the audience had to associate "Dewey" with "Republican;" Truman led them to associate "Republican" with "undesirable," leaving the association of "Dewey" with "undesirable" to be completed by the listeners. Thus the President linked his opponent's cause to what was not virtuous, thereby fulfilling the criterion.

The criterion was met in equally strong terms in the other speeches chosen for evaluation. Speaking before 75,000 farmers in Dexter, Iowa,<sup>4</sup> Truman said,

. . . when the Republican Congress rewrote the charter of the Commodity Credit Corporation this year, there were certain lobbyists in Washington representing the speculative grain trade. . . .

These big-business lobbyists and speculators persuaded the Congress not to provide the storage bins for the farmers. They tied the hands of the Administration. They are preventing us from setting up storage bins that you will need in order to get the support prices for your grain.

When the farmers have to sell their wheat below the support price because they have no place to store it, they can thank this same Republican Eightieth Congress. . . .<sup>5</sup>

In El Paso, Texas, Truman continued to meet the criterion.

Referring to the reclamation projects that had brought electricity and irrigated lands to the West, Truman stated:

The Republicans have consistently fought this program for the development of the West. That is why I have been amazed in this campaign to hear spokesmen for the Republican party claim that the Republican party is a friend of reclamation. The record proves that this is not so. . . .

The record shows that the Republican leaders in the House of Representatives cut the reclamation program for the West by more than 50 per cent in 1948. . . .<sup>6</sup>

The criterion was also repeatedly met in the Whistle-Stop speech delivered in Bonham, Texas. Truman said the reason he constantly referred to the Eightieth Congress was because

they raised a clear storm warning that tells us what we could expect if we had a Republican President. . . . We might have "unity" then. . . . But if we did have unity, what kind would it be?

It would be unity in giving tax relief to the rich at the expense of the poor--unity in refusing to give aids to our schools--unity in letting prices go sky high in order to protect excessive profits--unity in whittling away all the benefits of the New Deal about which the Republicans are so scornful.<sup>7</sup>

That Truman met the criterion--linking his opponent's cause with what is not virtuous--is readily apparent. Judging from the preponderance of evidence which might have been used

to illustrate fulfillment of this criterion, it becomes clear that undermining the opponent's cause was an integral part of the building of the President's character.

A second criterion that can be applied with frequency is question two referring to the bestowing of tempered praise upon himself and his cause. Examples of his fulfillment of this criterion are nearly as abundant as for the previous criterion. Truman apparently believed that discrediting the Republicans was not sufficient; establishing the inherent goodness of the Democrats--and especially himself--was also necessary.

In the Labor Day speech, the President immediately followed his remarks about the Republican depression by building the case for the Democratic party:

Then, in 1933, came the Administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

For the first time, labor received the recognition and encouragement that it needs--that it merits. By constructive legislation President Roosevelt and a sympathetic Congress corrected many of the abuses against labor. . . .

That Democratic Administration of which I was a part from 1935 passed the Wagner Act . . . ; abolished the sweatshop, provided unemployment compensation, passed the Social Security Act, saved millions of workers' homes from foreclosure, brought the average wage from 45 cents to \$1.33 an hour.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the passage he fulfills the criterion by lauding the accomplishments of his party.

At the same time, Truman meets still an additional criterion. With the use of the phrase "of which I was a part," the President also fulfills the criterion referring to the association of himself with what is virtuous. The President's

remarks simultaneously meet these two criteria in two additional speeches. In Dexter, Iowa, Truman stated:

For sixteen years the Democrats have been working on a crop of prosperity for the farmer. We have been plowing and seeding and cultivating the soil of the American economy in order to get a crop of prosperity that you have been enjoying for the past several years.

Today, farmers are faced with the threat that their markets will fail to keep up with their production. . . . But the Democratic party has a constructive way of preventing such a collapse.

We are reaching out to develop world markets that will absorb production above America's own needs. . . . We . . . are working to insure continued prosperity for American agriculture.

The Democratic party is fighting the farmer's battle. We believe that farmers are entitled to share equally with other people in our national income. We believe that a prosperous and productive agriculture is essential to our national welfare.<sup>9</sup>

The incumbent satisfies one criterion by praising the Democratic party in the opening paragraph. He also associates himself with the party's good deeds by repeatedly using "we," thereby meeting the second criterion.

In Bonham, Truman's fulfillment of those two criteria was also equally in evidence. There he focused on the desirability of finding foreign markets for the American farmers' surplus crops. In referring to the Republican stand against cotton loans, he declared:

They don't tell you how cotton loans rescued the farmers from the Republican mess of 1932, or how useful the Government stocks of cotton were during World War II. They don't tell you that the Truman Administration set up a vigorous cotton export program at the end of the war and completely wiped out the last of the cotton surplus--the headache that had plagued farmers for a quarter of a century.

Yes, and we've still got a vigorous cotton-export policy. . . .

As long as I have anything to say about it, we'll keep on knocking down trade barriers and opening foreign markets for American cotton.<sup>10</sup>

In El Paso, Truman concerned himself primarily with the first criterion discussed--associating the opponent's cause with what is not virtuous. He did praise his party, but not to the extent that he had in other speeches. Furthermore, he made very little effort to associate himself with what was virtuous.<sup>11</sup> A possible rationale is that, because the address was very short and of the Whistle-Stop variety, Truman may have deemed it more important to discredit the opponents than to laud himself or his party's accomplishments.

The frequency with which the President fulfills the two criteria is not, however, equitable. He bestows praise upon himself and his cause significantly more often than he associates himself with what is virtuous. Considering the circumstances, such action was extremely logical. National loyalty to the Democratic party was as strong as it had ever been; however, as has been well established, Mr. Truman was significantly less popular. By praising the merits of his party rather than himself, the President placed emphasis on the positive image of the Democrats and removed emphasis from his own questionable image. Indeed, he even delivered a speech during the campaign entitled "The Democratic Record,"<sup>12</sup> in which the dominant theme was establishing the inherent goodness of his party.

The logic of the strategy cannot be overlooked. The man whose image had been badly damaged very wisely directed

attention away from himself by capitalizing upon the accomplishments of his party. Members of the audience were made to see the need for the Democratic party, and in order to keep the party, they had to vote for Harry Truman.

Of the six criteria for determining character, possibly none is more important than the focus of question six: "Does the speaker create the impression of being completely sincere?" Regardless of how many criteria a speaker satisfies, if he appears insincere, he has defeated his cause. The criterion does not attempt to determine if the speaker really is sincere; he may in fact be totally dishonest. The criterion is concerned only with determining if the speaker creates the impression of sincerity.

In that respect, Truman was successful. One way in which he did so was by addressing himself directly to the special interests of the different audiences. While a speaker's concern for the interests of his audience does not necessarily evoke sincerity, it does indicate to the audience that the speaker may, indeed, be genuinely concerned with their special interests. The question of sincerity must ultimately be determined by the audience.

Truman exemplified his concern for the matters of significance to his audiences on numerous occasions in each speech. When speaking in Detroit, he took a very strong pro-labor position:

I believe that a strong and free labor movement constitutes a tremendous force for preserving our form of government. A free and strong labor movement is our best bulwark against communism.<sup>13</sup>

The President might have been personally anti-labor; however, by appealing to the special interests of his labor-oriented audience, he created the impression of being sincere. According to Time magazine, that impression was strong enough to help Truman receive the labor vote: "Labor, while making little noise in the campaign, had taken to heart Harry Truman's promise to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act, and had delivered at the polls."<sup>14</sup>

He followed this pattern in the three other speeches, exemplified by the Dexter address in which he stressed the importance of the farmer to the American economy and the necessity for the farmer's continuing prosperity. In El Paso, Truman's focus was the need for maintaining the reclamation projects vital to the development of the West. In Bonham, the President again dealt with agriculture, even though on this occasion he told the farmers that by selling their surplus crops, especially cotton and wheat, to foreign markets, they could play a vital part in helping build a strong foreign policy.

The President's most effective display of sincerity may well have been to his farming audiences. Time reported that "Harry Truman had promised the farmers full economic support. And the farmers, reversing the tradition that they vote Republican when they are prosperous, had voted for him."<sup>15</sup> Recognition of his sincerity was even granted by the Republicans. Senator-elect Karl E. Mundt of South Dakota painfully admitted, "The rural vote was decisive. If Dewey had gotten

it he could have won in Ohio, California, and Illinois. Farmers failed to accept his support of farm support prices as enthusiastic, as genuine, and as vigorous as that of President Truman. . . ."16

Another factor which increased the candidate's apparent sincerity was the language he used. Rather than using overly formal English, Truman's language was more the language of the people. Although informal, conversational language is not always indicative of sincerity, the ability to spontaneously speak with ease and freedom about matters of importance to others requires a certain amount of sincerity. To speak extemporaneously, as Truman did, the language must come from within the speaker. He is able to use natural, conversational language because the subject is meaningful to him. Sincerity may thus be established.

Two factors relating to the President's use of language help illustrate his apparent sincerity. The first was the frequent use of colloquial phrases such as "you folks,"<sup>17</sup> "I don't want to wear out my welcome,"<sup>18</sup> "how many times do you have to be hit on the head,"<sup>19</sup> and "squealing like a stuck pig."<sup>20</sup> In addition, he used contractions as abundantly as one would in a social conversation. These two factors in Truman's speaking allowed his language to appear informal and natural, thereby helping to create the impression of sincerity.

The important criterion, creating the impression of sincerity, is met by the President. Two primary strategies appear to have been instrumental in doing so: Truman appealed to the

special interests of his audiences; and he used the everyday language of the people to whom he was speaking. The result was that he appeared to his audiences as "one of them." This conclusion is supported by Senator J. Howard McGrath: "There is no stuffed shirt in Harry Truman's make-up. And therein lies one of his political assets. The plain people who make up the bulk of America's voting population view Harry S. Truman as a man like themselves."<sup>21</sup>

The ease with which people viewed Truman as "one of them" was probably increased by the unpopularity of Dewey's image. Regardless of the extent to which people disliked Truman's politics, it was difficult for them to vote for Dewey because of his cold, unappealing image. Abe Goff, defeated in his bid for re-election to Congress, told of five friends in his native Idaho "meeting the day after the election, each of whom voted for Truman because he didn't take to Dewey but each of whom thought that he alone had made his choice for that reason."<sup>22</sup> Doubt of Dewey's sincerity heightened belief in Truman's sincerity. This, in addition to the other factors described, helped the President to satisfy the criterion; of all the criteria considered, the fulfillment of this one may have been the most significant in the building of his ethical appeal.

The two remaining criteria refer to removing unfavorable impressions of himself and relying upon authority derived from personal experience. The analysis of the four speeches reveals that the occurrence of material which is applicable

to the former is virtually non-existent. Attempts to satisfy the criterion produce no results, either positive or negative, by which evaluative judgments of Truman's ethical appeal might be made. The latter criterion, relying upon authority derived from personal experience, is met by Truman, but only in subtle ways.

In the four speeches analyzed, the President did not "parade" his past associations, although he easily could have. He made virtually no direct references to the knowledge and authority gained from his position. Instead, he chose to subtly define his past associations. In a speech cited earlier in this chapter, Truman referred to "the union men with whom I have talked,"<sup>23</sup> thereby saying to his Detroit audience that he had, indeed, derived authority from his personal experience. References such as this subtly indicated that the President's position had enabled him to make associations which might have been less likely otherwise. By making these references, Truman helped to build his ethical appeal.

### Sagacity

Thonssen, Baird, and Braden's list of criteria for determining sagacity consists of five questions. The fourth, which refers to having a broad familiarity with the interests of the day, is readily demonstrable with respect to the speaking of Harry Truman.

The strongly pro-labor Detroit speech naturally included a discussion of the Taft-Hartley Law and the minimum

wage. Also included in the speech was an examination of taxes, inflation, and the increased prosperity for all Americans.<sup>24</sup>

Although the farming-oriented speech in Dexter focused on good prices for the farmers' crops, it was not limited to farming. High inflation, the Republican-imposed high tariffs, and the Cold War and Communism also provided material for consideration.<sup>25</sup>

Because of its brevity, Truman's speech in El Paso concentrated on only two issues. The first stressed the need for maintaining the reclamation projects necessary for irrigation and electricity. The remainder of the speech discussed the disadvantages of governmental-owned utilities, a move many Republicans favored.<sup>26</sup>

Truman's address in Bonham also illustrated his familiarity with the interests of the day. The speech focused on farming; it also included a discussion of the Cordell Hull reciprocal trade agreements, the Rural Electrification Administration, and the growth of international trade.<sup>27</sup>

From the four speeches, a general pattern seems to have developed. When giving a campaign speech, Truman chose one primary subject on which to address his audience. The speech was supplemented with additional remarks about other issues, such as taxes, inflations, or the Cold War. By using this format, he satisfied the criterion; more importantly, he demonstrated to the people that he had a broad knowledge of the interests of the day.

A second criterion Truman satisfied is the one which asks, "Does he use what is popularly called 'common sense'?" Because each person likes to believe that he is a rational and logical being, he appreciates the use of common sense. Although individual interpretations of the phrase may differ, the popular conception of common sense is the concern of the criterion. Truman exemplified that concept in Detroit:

Important Republican newspapers have already announced in plain language: the Republicans in Congress are preparing further and stronger measures against labor.

If the Congressional elements that made the Taft-Hartley Law are allowed to remain in power, and if these elements are further encouraged by the election of a Republican President, you men of labor can expect to be hit by a steady barrage of body blows.<sup>28</sup>

The incumbent illustrated his common sense in the second paragraph. To paraphrase him, "If these two events are allowed to occur, then common sense dictates that labor will be hurt." For those individuals whose common sense could not make that deduction, Truman had proof in the form of the Republican newspapers mentioned in the first paragraph.

In Dexter, the President's use of common sense was more down-to-earth. After he had verbally discredited the Republican image, he exclaimed:

All through this country the American farmer and the worker have been victims of boom and bust cycles--with accent on the bust, especially for the farmers and workers, and they have suffered alike in these misfortunes.

I wonder how many times do you have to be hit on the head before you find out what's hitting! It's about time that the people of America realized what the Republicans have been doing to them.<sup>29</sup>

Again the candidate is saying to his audience that their common sense should tell them that the Republicans are a detriment to them.

The El Paso address also satisfies the criterion. After describing a vote in which ninety-five percent of the House and Senate Republicans voted against restoring funds for reclamation, the President said:

By their votes ye shall know them. That is the difference between the Republican and the Democratic attitude toward the West. These are hard, cold facts. That is why I am amazed when I hear Republican orators trying to take credit for a program that the Democrats had to save from the Republican meat axe.<sup>30</sup>

Truman's common sense dictates to him that the Republican attitude is not desirable; he tells his audience that their common sense should do likewise.

When speaking in Bonham, the President continued to demonstrate fulfillment of the criterion:

When the Cordell Hull reciprocal-trade agreements program came up for renewal this year, the Republicans in Congress insisted on a lot of crippling amendments. Moreover, they renewed it for only one year instead of the usual three years. Apparently, they wanted to be in a position to do something next year that they didn't dare do this year, because this is an election year. It's obvious what they want to do next year. They want to kill the program entirely.<sup>31</sup>

In this speech, as in the others, Truman was using the fulfillment of the criterion "common sense" as a means to an end. In the cited examples, his intention was to vituperate the Republicans to such an extent that common sense would tell the audience how to vote. He did this because his common sense had dictated that a sound campaign strategy would be

the vilification of the Republican party. Judging from the results, his common sense was not mistaken.

Two additional criteria for evaluation are "Does he display a sense of good taste?" and "Does he act with tact and moderation?" The results of analyzing these criteria indicate neither a negative nor an affirmative answer. One reason is because tact, moderation, and good taste are not attributes for which the President was especially known. Furthermore, a political campaigner with the reputation of a "'Give-'em-Hell,' Harry" would not be blamed for failing to temper his political statements, nor would he be expected to do so.

This is not to intimate that the President was completely without tact or good taste. Although he was known for his frequent use of profanity, none of the speeches analyzed contains language which might be called profane. If this is indicative of tact and good taste, then the candidate satisfied the criterion.

For Harry Truman to make an overt attempt to soften his political statements would have been antithetical to his very nature. As illustrated in the confrontation with the Dixiecrats, he would not compromise himself for the caprices of extremists. Similarly, it is not surprising that a rhetorical analysis uncovers no compromise. Lending consideration to being tactful and moderate simply was not warranted sufficiently important to be among the priorities of the Whistle-Stop campaign. In view of the President's reputation, failure to meet the criterion cannot be labelled as a "fatal flaw" to his ethical appeal.

The final criterion to be considered in determining sagacity is, "Does he show through the use of his speech materials that he is possessed of intellectual integrity and wisdom?" While this criterion has potential validity and importance, it is not applicable to the rhetorical situations under consideration in this analysis. The speaking of the Whistle-Stop campaign did not require the development of Truman's intellectual integrity and wisdom. Consequently, the application of this criterion to the selected speeches provides neither favorable nor unfavorable material for evaluation.

#### Good Will

The first criterion to be evaluated in determining Truman's good will is the second in Thonssen, Baird, and Braden's list of six: "Does he identify himself with the listeners and their problems?" This criterion is met fully and frequently throughout the four speeches. The President exemplified this in Detroit by identifying first with the housewives, then with the laborers:

As real wages decline in the face of rising prices, it is the housewife who must try desperately to feed and clothe her family, while her buying power is steadily whittled away.

My sympathy is with those best of business managers, the wives and mothers of this nation. Think how they have made the pay envelopes stretch with each rise in prices.

Now mother has to outfit the children for school at outrageous prices. How she does it I don't know. . . .  
 . . . . .  
 It is time that every American recognized what our fathers knew--that it is an honorable thing to work with your hands.

Our basic social freedoms can be traced largely to the fact that labor had its birth of real freedom in the United States of America. That is why our fathers came to America--to find the country where the man who worked with his hands was as good as the next man.

Today too many Americans in dining cars and country clubs and fashionable resorts are repeating like parrots the phrase "Labor must be kept in its place."

It is time that all Americans realized that the place of labor is side by side with the businessman and with the farmer, and not one degree lower.<sup>32</sup>

Statements such as those could do nothing but help Truman win votes. Because of the opinions of the polls, this tactic was certainly worth repeating.

When speaking in Dexter, Truman adapted his comments to the interests of his audience. He discussed issues other than farming, but the address was primarily concerned with continuing price supports, the necessity for storage bins for excess crops, and continuing prosperity for the farmer. The President identified most strongly with the farming-oriented audience near the end of the speech:

Your best protection is to elect a Democratic Congress and a President that will play fair with the farmer--an Administration that will reinforce soil conservation, provide adequate storage facilities for grain, encourage production, and help the farmer make enough on his crop to meet the cost of living and have something left over.

I don't need to tell you how long it takes to get a good crop, and how big the dangers are. You can work a year, plowing and cultivating, and then at the last minute, a sudden drought or flood can wipe you out.<sup>33</sup>

In the first paragraph, Truman illustrated that he was aware of the things the farmer wanted, especially when he said, "and have something left over." The President then empathized with the audience, demonstrating that he was well

aware of the hazards of farming. These words had to reassure the audience that this man speaking to them was fully aware of the problems of being a farmer.

Truman's audience in El Paso was deeply concerned with reclamation. His speech established that he was also aware of their interests:

In 1933, the Democrats took the reclamation program out of mothballs and put it into practice. This was because the American people had elected a President who believed in the West--Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Today reclamation projects irrigate 4,500,000 acres of land and provide more than 3,000,000 kilowatts of power.

You people in El Paso know how important these things are. Over \$20,000,000 has been spent on the Rio Grande project. Right here in your area it irrigates 160,000 acres.<sup>34</sup>

As with the laborers of Detroit and the farmers of Dexter, the President's El Paso speech must have reassured his audience that he would work for their special interests.

Bonham, Texas, is the hometown of then-Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn. Truman capitalized on that by associating the "hometown-hero" with something else of importance to local residents: electricity. The President exclaimed:

Ask Sam Rayburn how many of the big-money boys helped when he was sweating blood to get electricity for farmers and people in small towns. You know, Sam was one of the fathers of the Rural Electrification Administration. It's a great monument to him.

When he started working to get REA, you folks in Texas had electricity on very few farms--only on twenty-three in every thousand. Last year over half of the farms in Texas had electricity. And we intend to push that program vigorously during the next four years.<sup>35</sup>

Nearly every speech textbook stresses the importance of audience adaptation, or identifying with the listeners and

their problems. This fundamental precept was wisely met by the incumbent in each of the four speeches analyzed. Truman adapted his comments to identify strongly with the special interests of each audience, a political strategy that could produce a preponderance of favorable results.

A second criterion which Truman satisfactorily met is in the first question, "Does he capture the proper balance between too much and too little praise of his audience?" The candidate did not waste words on mundane niceties, but at the beginning of each speech he did make an effort to momentarily flatter his listeners. In Detroit, he began his speech by saying:

Mr. Mayor, distinguished leaders of labor and fellow citizens: This, in my opinion, is a great day for the country. When I can stand on the same platform in Detroit with the Mayor and Walter Reuther and Frank Martell, I know the country is on the road to recovery.<sup>36</sup>

Of the four speeches, Truman's praise of his Detroit audience is the most tempered. In comparison, the praise offered in the Dexter speech is much stronger.

Mr. Chairman and the good farmers who are responsible for this wonderful demonstration:

It does my heart good to see the grain fields of this nation again. They are a wonderful sight. The record-breaking harvests you have been getting in recent years have been a blessing. Millions of people have been saved from starvation by the food you have produced. The whole world has reason to be everlastingly grateful to the farmers of the United States.<sup>37</sup>

In Dexter, the President praised the results of the area's farming industry. In El Paso, he praised the audience by telling them that their city held many pleasing memories for him: "It gives me a great deal of pleasure to come back to

El Paso once more. I have been here on a number of occasions, and I have spent here some of the pleasantest hours of my life."<sup>38</sup> Such words must have increased Truman's ethical appeal in the eyes of the El Paso voters.

When he spoke in Bonham, the President divided his praise between Texas and Sam Rayburn: "I have a warm spot in my heart for Texas. Texas has given me some of the best friends a man ever had. And I'm glad to be here today in the hometown of one of the finest and best of all--Sam Rayburn."<sup>39</sup> With the reputation Texans have for being exceedingly proud of their state, the President's remarks could only help him gain votes.

People want to hear flattering things about themselves. This is an axiom any competent speaker will observe, and Truman was no exception. His praise was limited to the opening remarks in each speech; it was neither so much as to make him appear insincere, nor so little that the listeners might have felt forgotten. It is probably safe to say that the President did indeed capture the proper balance between too much and too little praise of his audience.

Another criterion for determining a speaker's good will is question three: "Does he proceed with candor and straightforwardness?" Harry Truman's reputation as "'Give-'em-Hell,' Harry" was established because of his refusal to speak with anything less than candor and straightforwardness. That he would fully satisfy this criterion in a campaign in which his political life was at stake is probably axiomatic.

In two of the speeches analyzed, the President admitted he was about to speak with candor and straightforwardness. In Detroit he declared: "As you know, I speak plainly sometimes--in fact, I speak bluntly sometimes and I am going to speak plainly and bluntly now."<sup>40</sup> He also demonstrated his candor in El Paso: "I want to talk to you very frankly about some of the vital issues in this campaign, issues in which you are interested."<sup>41</sup>

Each of the four speeches illustrates that Truman was candid and straightforward. As the underdog in the campaign, he had to take decisive action; candor and straightforwardness, already integral parts of his reputation, were instrumental in helping him do so.

The fourth criterion is, "Does he offer necessary rebukes with tact and consideration?" While the President did occasionally reprimand his audiences for electing the Republican-dominated Eightieth Congress, he did not necessarily do so with tact and consideration. Earlier analysis indicated that his outspoken reputation did not include tact and consideration as dominant elements.

The fifth criterion, "Does he offset any personal reasons he may have for giving the speech?," was not dealt with by Truman in any of the speeches being surveyed. The President did answer this criterion when he wrote his Memoirs:

If I had heeded the advice of my family, I would have made plans to leave the White House at the end of my first term. I took no steps and made no moves at any time to discourage anyone from seeking nomination to succeed me. From a personal standpoint, I had no

desire, just as I had none in 1944, to undertake a national political campaign merely for the sake of gratifying private ambitions. . . .

The compelling motive in my decision to run for the presidency in 1948 was the same as it had been in 1944. There was still "unfinished business" confronting the most successful fifteen years of Democratic administration in the history of the country. . . .<sup>42</sup>

Truman's Memoirs clearly illustrates that his reasons for being a candidate were not personal. That he failed to make that apparent in his campaign speeches probably did not carry sufficient impact to do measurable damage to his ethical appeal.

The final criterion in the evaluation of good will asks, "Does he reveal without exhibitionism his personable qualities as a messenger of the truth?" If the absence of verbal exhibitionism warrants an affirmative answer, then the President did satisfy the criterion. Examination of the speeches uncovered no abuse of ethical appeal which might have been called exhibitionistic.

### Summary

This chapter has applied the set of criteria developed by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden to four of the campaign speeches delivered by Harry Truman in 1948 for the purpose of evaluating his use of ethical appeal. Accordingly, three constituents of ethical appeal have been considered: character, sagacity, and good will.

The application of the list of six criteria for determining character revealed that the President's speaking satisfied five. Of these, associating the opponent's cause

with what is not virtuous and bestowing tempered praise upon his cause were found to be primary strategies in the development of Truman's character. The important criterion determining the impression of sincerity was also among those satisfied, thus helping to strengthen the President's character.

In determining Truman's use of sagacity, two of the five criteria were fully met. Evidence demonstrating both his broad familiarity with the interests of the day and his use of common sense readily fulfilled each of the two criterion. Application of the three remaining criteria failed to provide sufficient material for analysis, resulting in neither favorable nor unfavorable conclusions.

The list of criteria for evaluating a speaker's good will included six questions. Analysis of the four speeches indicated that three of these were clearly met. Of the remaining three, the criterion referring to offsetting personal reasons for giving the speech was dealt with when the President wrote his Memoirs; the offering of necessary rebukes was shown as not being applicable to the rhetorical situations; and examination of his personable qualities as a messenger revealed no abuse of ethical appeal which might have been called exhibitionistic.

The fulfillment of certain criteria has been shown to have played a significant part in the development of the President's ethos during this period. In addition, this evaluation has established certain trends from which generalizations regarding the President's use of ethical appeal

may be drawn. Those results will be delineated in the concluding chapter.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Jennings Randolph, "Truman--A Winning Speaker," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 24 (December, 1948), 421.
- <sup>2</sup>Cabell Phillips, The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession (New York: MacMillan Co., 1966), pp. 231-232.
- <sup>3</sup>Harry S. Truman, "Labor Must Have a Friendly Administration and Congress," Vital Speeches of the Day, 15 September 1948, p. 713.
- <sup>4</sup>Phillips, p. 236.
- <sup>5</sup>"Text of Truman's Address at Dexter, Iowa, Opening His Western Drive," New York Times, 19 September 1948, Sec. 1, p. 3. Hereafter
- <sup>6</sup>"Text of Truman's Address in El Paso," New York Times, 26 September 1948, Sec. 1, p. 65. Hereafter cited as "El Paso Speech."
- <sup>7</sup>"The Text of Truman's Texas Speech Assailing the GOP 'Unity' Call," New York Times, 28 September 1948, Sec. 1, p. 20. Hereafter cited as "Bonham Speech."
- <sup>8</sup>Detroit Speech, p. 713.
- <sup>9</sup>Dexter Speech, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup>Bonham Speech, p. 20.
- <sup>11</sup>El Paso Speech, p. 65.
- <sup>12</sup>Delivered in Denver on September 20, 1948. For text see Vital Speeches of the Day, 1 October 1948, p. 738.
- <sup>13</sup>Detroit Speech, p. 713.
- <sup>14</sup>"Independence Day," Time, 8 November 1948, p. 21.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup>Jules Abels, Out of the Jaws of Victory (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959), p. 276.
- <sup>17</sup>Bonham Speech, p. 20.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid.

- 19Dexter Speech, p. 3.
- 20El Paso Speech, p. 65.
- 21J. Howard McGrath, "The Case for President Truman," Saturday Evening Post, 2 October 1948, p. 20.
- 22Abels, p. 295.
- 23Detroit Speech, p. 713.
- 24Ibid., pp. 712-714.
- 25Dexter Speech, pp. 3, 5.
- 26El Paso Speech, pp. 65-66.
- 27Bonham Speech, p. 20.
- 28Detroit Speech, p. 714.
- 29Dexter Speech, p. 3.
- 30El Paso Speech, p. 65.
- 31Bonham Speech, p. 20.
- 32Detroit Speech, p. 714.
- 33Dexter Speech, p. 5.
- 34El Paso Speech, p. 65.
- 35Bonham Speech, p. 20.
- 36Detroit Speech, p. 712.
- 37Dexter Speech, p. 3.
- 38El Paso Speech, p. 65.
- 39Bonham Speech, p. 20.
- 40Detroit Speech, p. 712.
- 41El Paso Speech, p. 65.
- 42Harry S. Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, Vol. II of Memoirs (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1956), p. 170.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

This study has presented an examination and evaluation of Harry S. Truman's use of ethical appeal during the 1948 Presidential campaign. In order to understand the circumstances with which the President had to deal, an overview of the 1948 political situation was presented in Chapter II. Included in the chapter was an analysis of the causes and effects of the incumbent's declining popularity, an examination of the other leading candidates, and the campaign strategy which resulted from those circumstances.

The following chapter evaluated Truman's use of ethical appeal in four speeches selected from the campaign. The set of evaluative criteria, developed by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden, included three constituents of ethical appeal: character, sagacity, and good will.

The list of criteria for evaluating a speaker's character included six questions. Of these, examples satisfying five were found in the speeches selected for analysis. Linking the opponent and his cause with what is not virtuous, bestowing tempered praise upon himself and his cause, and associating himself with what is virtuous are the three criteria which were satisfied most frequently. A fourth criterion, relying upon authority derived from personal experience, was also

satisfactorily fulfilled, although not with the frequency of the previous three. The other criterion for determining character which the President met referred to creating the impression of sincerity. Evidence indicates that the fulfillment of this criterion may have been the most influential in building the President's character. The final criterion dealt with removing or minimizing unfavorable impressions previously established by the opponent; analysis of the four speeches revealed that the question was not really applicable to the rhetorical situations under consideration.

The evaluation of sagacity, the second constituent of ethical appeal, included five criteria. Quotations from each of the four speeches readily demonstrated that Truman satisfied the two criteria referring to the use of "common sense" and having a broad familiarity with the interests of the day. The analysis of two other criteria, acting with tact and moderation and displaying a sense of good taste, indicated that Truman's reputation as "Give-'em-Hell, Harry" was antithetical to the concepts of tact, moderation, and good taste; however, nowhere in the texts of the four speeches did the President exemplify behavior which might have produced results unfavorable to the evaluation. The final criterion for determining sagacity inquired about the speaker's use of intellectual integrity and wisdom. The evaluation revealed that the nature of the Whistle-Stop tour was such that intellectual integrity and wisdom were not required among its priorities.

The final section of the evaluation determined the President's good will. Of the six criteria considered, three were satisfied with considerable frequency: capturing the proper balance between too much and too little praise of his audience; identifying himself with the listeners and their problems; and proceeding with candor and straightforwardness were all important elements in building Truman's ethical appeal. Quotations from each speech demonstrated fulfillment of them. A fourth criterion asked if the speaker offset any personal reasons for giving the speech. Although the question was not dealt with in any of the speeches, the President did explain his reasons for being a candidate when he wrote his Memoirs. The two remaining criteria referred to offering rebukes with tact and consideration and revealing without exhibitionism his personable qualities as a messenger of the truth. Analysis of the four speeches revealed that there was not really sufficient material to produce results either favorable or unfavorable to the development of the President's ethos.

The results produced by the evaluation are more than sufficient for determining Truman's use of ethical appeal. However, it is not uncommon for a set of evaluative criteria to produce incomplete results, especially in an area with as many variables as a public speech. Too often, important elements simply cannot be neatly categorized by the criteria; unless they are additionally evaluated, influential factors may be left unnoticed.

While this evaluation uncovers many important elements in Truman's use of ethical appeal, there are also other factors which might have been influential in the development of his ethos. That these other elements are not measured by the criteria does not negate the evaluation. The evaluation alone amply illustrates the quality of the President's ethical appeal. The implementation of other ethos-building elements not considered by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden's set of criteria only supplements the results of the evaluation.

One element inherent to Truman's reputation is highlighted repeatedly in books about him. His informal, down-to-earth nature had given him the potential of a man to whom all people could relate, and the structure of the Whistle-Stop tour afforded the perfect opportunity to display that nature. Jules Abels referred to the rear-platform talks as "a minor masterpiece of corn and the common touch."<sup>1</sup>

Truman took his case to the people of America, the "John Does" and "Mary Smiths" who are the foundation of the middle class, the hard-working citizens who are the farmers, housewives, minorities, and blue-collar workers of this country. In short, the President campaigned not just to the voters of America, but to the people of what is nostalgically called "Americana." With this foundation of American society, ideals such as sincerity, hard-work, and the family are associated. A man who is forthright and candid, who does not "beat around the bush," is to be respected, and someone who "puts on airs" and is not himself is generally unpopular.

Because Truman was "one of them," he liked to be out among the members of his audience. He frequently left the rear platform to mingle with the crowds. In Ardmore, Oklahoma, he even stepped down to examine a horse and inform the owner of its age.<sup>2</sup>

Six months after taking office in 1945, the President made a five-day trip to Caruthersville, Missouri, for the state convention of the American Legion. Although the time period is well before the 1948 campaign, Bert Cochran's account of the President's behavior, and the people's reaction to it, exemplifies his grass roots appeal:

. . . according to one newspaperman, he "did everything except have himself shot from the mouth of a cannon." He held court on the porch of the town's rundown hotel, gossiped with farmers, politicians, and inebriated veterans, performed the traditional rite of spitting into the Mississippi. By noon of the first day he had pinned medals on a troop of boy scouts, accepted membership in the Lions Club, attended church services, received a custom-built hat from the local clothier, shaken hundreds of hands, and given equal numbers of autographs. . . . That evening, at a dinner served by the Methodist Church ladies, Truman pounded out Paderewski's Minuet on a battered piano, and at the finish, turning himself around on the piano stool, announced, winking at the ladies, "When I played this, Stalin signed the Potsdam agreement." Everyone applauded. Here was democracy at work and history in the making.<sup>3</sup>

The President carried this element of the common man with him throughout the campaign. Following the speech in Dexter, Iowa, the President did what he often did after delivering a major address:

After his formal speech Truman returned to the platform for an informal, folksy talk. He said that he had been asked if he could plow a straight furrow. "A prejudiced witness said so--my mother." He told how he used to seed a 160-acre wheat field "without leaving a skip"

and how he plowed with four Missouri mules and a gang plow while they now used a tractor. Farmers who had heard Truman at Dexter talked him up all over the farm belt.<sup>4</sup>

Although the informal speeches were seldom transcribed word for word, their effect of strengthening the President's appeal was probably substantial.

Cabell Phillips also remarked upon the incumbent's down-to-earth appeal:

The crowds were big, friendly, and good-naturedly boisterous. Truman caught their mood and reflected it back to them in his warm, sparkling grin, in his genial, unpretentious manner, in his flat, earthy prose. He was one of them. He spoke the language of the courthouse steps, the Baptist Church, the businessmen's table at the Busy Bee Cafe. He was fighting their battle with high prices, with a stubborn Congress, with Russian communism. There were no tricks about this fellow; he was down to earth on the level, called a spade a spade. They warmed up to him.<sup>5</sup>

Truman did not hesitate to appear before his audiences as a human being. Indeed, the folksy manner of Harry Truman was not necessarily something that needed "showing;" it was an inherent element of his constitution. That he demonstrated his human nature by being himself may have been an important factor in establishing his ethos. Cabell Phillips concurred when he stated that "two devices--the natural, homespun speeches and the accurate and intimate hometown lore he was able to put into them--had an important bearing on the outcome of the campaign."<sup>6</sup>

The quotations cited all verify that the people responded warmly and positively to the President. It was not uncommon for audience members to interrupt his speaking with calls of

"Pour it on, Harry!" and "Give 'em Hell, Harry!"<sup>7</sup> Such response indicates that he was communicating with his audience. Had he commanded a more formal and imposing image, the calls from the audience might have been considerably less enthusiastic. That Truman was "one of them" cannot be over-emphasized; it may well have been his strongest form of ethical appeal.

A second element for which Truman was often admired was his spunkiness as a fighter. He was the underdog, and Americans had just won a war which they had begun as underdogs. It was natural for the public to admire a man who had to fight to come from behind. One columnist, in referring to the campaign, said it was "fun to see the scrappy little cuss come out of his corner fighting . . . not trying to use big words any longer, but being himself and saying a lot of honest things."<sup>8</sup>

Praise and admiration for Truman's fighting spirit also came from Cabell Phillips:

No one believed he could win, and many had told him so. His party treasury was broke, the party organization was in chaos, and . . . he was on the defensive as a candidate. So he fought with the heedless, slambang ferocity of the underdog who knows there is only one way out--and set the public imagination on fire.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the strongest praise of the President's refusal to quit came from a Republican, Senator Arthur Vandenburg. The day following the election, he remarked, "You've got to give the little man credit. There he was flat on his back. Everyone had counted him out, but he came up fighting and

won the battle. That's the kind of courage the American people admire."<sup>10</sup>

Truman's lack of popularity with the public opinion polls was common knowledge. The American public was as aware of his struggle for votes as his own campaign strategists were. His persistence and refusal to quit fighting were impressive to all, even members of the opposition. In view of the admiration expressed by others, it is conceivable that the President's fighting spirit in what may have been the most challenging battle ever waged by a politician was an important factor in determining the strength of his ethos.

A third element not considered by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden's criteria also appears to have helped increased the President's ethical appeal. Truman had a strong reputation as a family man; Bert Cochran said that he was "passionately devoted to his wife and daughter."<sup>11</sup> During the Whistle-Stop tour, Bess and Margaret Truman accompanied him everywhere. At each stop he would follow the speech by introducing the women in his life. The introduction of twenty-four year old Margaret "always set off the loudest response of all, liberally spiced with wolf whistles from the boys and young men."<sup>12</sup>

The image of a family man is one politicians try to convey; it conforms with the wholesome, all-American appeal desired by the voters. The President did more than convey the image of a family man; he exemplified a responsible, protective husband and father, and his concern for his family could only help him obtain more votes. Bess and Margaret Truman were as much a

part of the Presidency as Harry Truman was, and to the American people, that was as it should be.

The three elements discussed--the President's down-to-earth attitude, his fighting spirit, and his reputation as a family man--were not measured by the criteria, but all may have been influential in the development of his character. Their importance lies in the fact that they further illustrate the strength of Truman's ethical appeal established by this evaluation.

How strong the President's ethos really was is not difficult to deduce. He fully satisfied ten of the total of seventeen criteria developed by Thonssen, Baird, and Braden; three other criteria applied to the speeches also provided favorable, but less influential, results. Although the remaining four criteria were not applicable to the rhetorical situations, that they provided neither favorable nor unfavorable results did not affect the development of the President's ethos. In addition, other elements not clearly measured by the seventeen criteria played a part in strengthening his ethical appeal.

The most important criterion satisfied by the President was that referring to creating the impression of sincerity. It is axiomatic that establishing sincerity is vital to establishing a strong character. However, there is a relationship between sincerity and each of the two other constituents of ethical appeal, sagacity and good will. If a speaker's sincerity is in doubt, his attempts to demonstrate sagacity may

be questioned. Likewise, an insincere man attempting to establish good will may be labelled as "phony." Quotations cited and sources quoted demonstrated that Truman established a strong impression of sincerity; in so doing, he strengthened his use of sagacity and good will.

Of the remaining criteria, there is a preponderance of evidence supporting three. Associating the opponent's cause with what is not virtuous, bestowing tempered praise on himself and his cause, and identifying himself with the listeners and their problems are fulfilled with such frequency that they emerge as major strategies in the building of the President's ethos. Regardless of other criteria which may or may not have been fulfilled in the four speeches analyzed, examples of each of these three were present. The extent to which Truman met these criteria is such that it is probably safe to say that had they been eliminated from his speaking, the result would have been detrimental to the establishment of his ethical appeal.

This evaluation has shown that Harry Truman used his ethical appeal to his own advantage; indeed, he used it so completely that it might be said of him that he was the personification of ethical appeal.

Such a competent use of ethos may be of great benefit to the speaker. Thonssen, Baird, and Braden report that:

Writers are virtually of one mind . . . in declaring that the force of the speaker's personality or character is instrumental in facilitating the acceptance of beliefs. . . . Conversely, a personal touch which is neither pleasing

nor inspiring may, and often does, militate against the speaker's likelihood of achieving the desired response.<sup>13</sup>

Aristotle also comments on the importance of ethos to the persuasive speaker:

The instrument of proof is the moral character . . . when the delivery of the speech is such as to produce an impression of the speaker's credibility; for we yield a more complete and ready credence to persons of high character not only ordinarily and in a general way, but in such matters as do not admit of absolute certainty but necessarily leave room for difference of opinion, without any qualification whatsoever.<sup>14</sup>

In short, a strong ethical appeal has the potential for being a speaker's strongest mode of persuasion. All other factors being equal, the speaker who enjoys a high degree of ethos will be the most successful.

In view of the overwhelming strength of opinion against the President early in 1948 and the results on election day, 1948, Harry Truman's use of ethical appeal probably had a significant effect on the voters of America. Regardless of the quality of his use of pathos or logos, a less capable use of ethical appeal would probably have had a fatal effect on his campaign.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jules Abels, Out of the Jaws of Victory (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>3</sup>Bert Cochran, Harry Truman and the Crisis Presidency (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1973), pp. 222-223.

<sup>4</sup>Abels, p. 180.

<sup>5</sup>Cabell Phillips, The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession (New York: MacMillan Co., 1966), pp. 214-215.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>8</sup>Alonzo Hamby, Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 244.

<sup>9</sup>Phillips, p. 225.

<sup>10</sup>Cochran, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>12</sup>Phillips, p. 239.

<sup>13</sup>Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird, and Waldo W. Braden, Speech Criticism, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1970), p. 445.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 446.

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