

WORLD WAR II AND ITS AFTERMATH**Biography**

Harry Truman became president of the United States as World War II was ending. His decisions helped shape the political and economic realities of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. ♦ *As you read, think about the personality traits that helped Truman act decisively as president. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Harry Truman (1884–1972)

Harry Truman was born in Missouri on May 8, 1884. He was the oldest of three children. As a child, Truman was a good student, and he grew up with a love for reading and music.

After graduating from high school in 1901, Truman briefly attended business school. He also worked as a bank clerk and on the family farm.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I, and 32-year-old Truman volunteered to join the army. He served in France as the captain of a U.S. field artillery unit and won the loyalty of the men under his command with his leadership abilities. He returned home in 1919, married his childhood sweetheart, Bess, and opened a men's clothing store. When the business failed, a friend encouraged Truman to enter politics. After winning some local elections, he won a U.S. Senate seat in 1934.

During Truman's second term in the Senate, he gained national recognition for chairing a committee that looked into waste and fraud in the U.S. military. It was this work that brought him to the attention of President Franklin Roosevelt, who asked Truman to run as vice president in the 1944 election. When Roosevelt died 83 days into his fourth term, Truman became president. He was sworn in on April 12, 1945.



Harry Truman

Truman oversaw the end of World War II in Europe. While in Europe conferring with the Allies, Truman received word of a successful atomic bomb test by U.S. scientists. Turning his attention to the war with Japan,

he demanded that the Japanese surrender. When Japan refused, Truman ordered the atomic bomb be dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Shortly after the second bombing, Japan surrendered.

Truman soon had to face the beginning of the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. In 1947, he proclaimed the Truman Doctrine, stating that the United States would oppose Soviet aggression anywhere around the globe.

Many political observers thought Truman was going to lose his 1948 bid for reelection, but Truman's cross-country campaign fueled an upset victory. Truman faced many challenges through his second term in office. He dealt with rising tensions related to the Cold War, including the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948 and the start of the Korean War in 1950.

After completing his second term, Truman continued to be active in the Democratic Party, and spent time campaigning for Democratic candidates. In the mid-1960s, Truman's health declined rapidly. He died the day after Christmas in 1972.

Questions to Think About

1. What were some of the jobs Truman held before he became president?
2. What did Truman do to bring World War II to a close?
3. **Analyze Information** How do you think Truman's personality and experience contributed to decisions he made as president?

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Primary Source

On August 6, 1945, an American plane dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. John Hersey's classic book *Hiroshima*, written in 1946, vividly captures the aftermath of the bombing. Hersey interviewed six residents who survived the blast, and in the book he recounts their experiences. ♦ *As you read this excerpt, think about the experience of people living in Hiroshima when the United States dropped the bomb. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

From *Hiroshima* by John Hersey

As Mrs. Nakamura stood watching her neighbor, everything flashed whiter than any white she had ever seen. . . . She had taken a single step (the house was 1,350 yards, or three-quarters of a mile, from the center of the explosion) when something picked her up and she seemed to fly into the next room . . . pursued by parts of her house.

. . . The debris did not cover her deeply. She rose up and freed herself. She heard a child cry. . . . As Mrs. Nakamura started frantically to claw her way toward the baby, she could see or hear nothing of her other children. . . .

[Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, the Red Cross Hospital surgeon] . . . was one step beyond an open window when the light of the bomb was reflected, like a gigantic photographic flash, in the corridor. . . . Just then (the building was 1,650 yards from the center), the blast ripped through the hospital. The glasses he was wearing flew off his face . . . his Japanese slippers zipped out from under his feet—but

otherwise, thanks to where he stood, he was untouched.

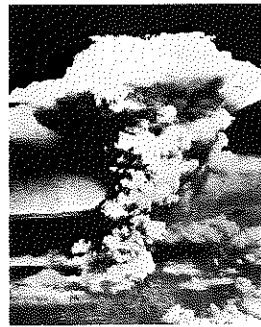
. . . The hospital was in horrible confusion . . . windows had blown in and cut people,

blood was spattered, . . . many of the patients were running about screaming, many more lay dead. . . . Dr. Sasaki found himself the only doctor in the hospital who was unhurt.

Dr. Sasaki, who believed that the enemy had hit only the building he was in, . . . got bandages and began to bind the wounds of those inside the hospital; while outside, all over Hiroshima, maimed and dying citizens turned their unsteady steps toward the Red Cross Hospital. . . .

. . . Mr. Tanimoto saw an astonishing panorama. . . . as much of Hiroshima as he could see through the clouded air was giving off a thick, dreadful miasma [poisonous fog]. . . .

He had thought of his wife and baby, his church, his home, his parishioners, all of them down in that awful murk. Once more he began to run in fear—toward the city.

**Atomic bomb blast****Questions to Think About**

1. What was Mrs. Nakamura's first response when the atomic bomb went off?
2. How did Dr. Sasaki respond to the crisis? What did Mr. Tanimoto do?
3. **Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** When President Truman decided to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese, no one knew

exactly what the effects would be. Knowing what we know now, do you think the atomic bomb should ever be used again? Why or why not?

4. **Activity** Research the bombing of Hiroshima. Then, write a poem or story to represent the effects of the bomb on the city and people.