

African-American leaders and organizations warned that segregation would preclude more qualified African-American women from joining the Corps. Civilian African-American leaders, such as Mary McLeod Bethune, assisted black WAC officers and recruiters by urging African-American women to volunteer. Despite such efforts, however, recruitment was difficult. Many who volunteered had been poorly educated in the segregated South. Putney notes that "the military failed to keep its pledge to many black WACs that it would not discriminate in job assignments and would accord them equal rights and privileges" (119). The WACs responded to such treatment by communicating about the problems with both army and civilian leaders, striking, and resigning from the service. Field commanders were generally unwilling to request African Americans for service; when they were given field assignments, however, they worked as secretaries, mail clerks, medical assistants and technicians, and parachute inspectors.

When the Nation Was in Need is a good general examination of the African-American WACs and their experiences, an in-depth look neglected in the official history of the WAC (*The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978*, by Bettie J. Morden [1990]). Putney clearly shows the reactivity of the WAC in matters of race. Although the quota for African-American WACs was 10.6 percent of total WAC enlistment, enlistment of African-American women never reached that level.

Due to the breadth of the topic, perhaps, the author does not manage to address many of the day-to-day happenings and experiences in the life of an African-American WAC. More detailed studies of individual black WAC units, posts to which they were assigned, and daily routines and happenings would provide an added dimension to the topic. The book is, however, interesting and well written and provides statistics concerning the numbers of black WACs, names of officers, and unit assignments. Of further value are the sources listed in the bibliography.

Harry S. Truman: A Life, by Robert H. Ferrell. Missouri Biography Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994. xiv, 501 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JAMES E. MCMILLAN, CENTRAL COLLEGE

With *Harry S. Truman: A Life*, Robert H. Ferrell caps his career with his ninth work, and first full biography, on the American president whom he terms "the right man for his time . . . one of the best choices fate could have provided" (xi-xii).

Truman's most unlikely prepresidential background began on the "non-descriptive" prairies of Missouri where lack of "feasts for the

eye served to concentrate the mind" (1). Young Truman dodged the obstacles of a financially and physically disadvantaged childhood while developing his own uniqueness. Both town and country informed young Truman's life in Kansas City banks and on the family farm. Ferrell, whose previous work includes an entire book on the Truman farms, is particularly perceptive on the agrarian life. He credits this lifestyle with providing the future president with his work ethic, patience, stoicism, and respect for solitude.

Truman himself later singled out the farm, finance, and the military as the three necessary ingredients for a political career. His army acquaintances did facilitate his rise in politics. Even his subsequent failure as a clothier inadvertently helped him build a respect for fiscal conservatism. He later reaped rewards for a conservative approach to national economics during the U.S. Senate investigations of war expenditures.

Truman's political rise could not have been accomplished, however, without the strong arm of Kansas City's dominating urban boss, Thomas J. Pendergast. It is ironic that the man who rose from county judge to "Senator from Pendergast" soon eclipsed his shadowy benefactor. Senator Truman, through honesty and industry, rose to become a darkhorse candidate for the vice presidency. Then, in what Ferrell terms the "most extraordinary political arrangement of the present century" (162), Truman helped to oust sitting vice-president Henry Wallace.

Unlike his imperious predecessor, President Truman studiously preserved the separation between the man and the office. He surprised his detractors by handling delicate and crisis situations with a strong, steady hand. Heads rolled as he fashioned his own domain. He was oblivious to opinion and attuned to efficiency; he ousted Wallace, whom he liked, and Jimmie Byrnes, whom he didn't; he also dismissed Edward Stettinius, whom he disregarded, and Harold Ickes, to whom he would not defer. Lastly, he scrapped MacArthur, "the right hand of God," whom he detested.

Author Ferrell treats Iowans Henry Wallace and ex-president Herbert Hoover positively, as did his subject. Truman's difficulties with Wallace over the vice-presidency, the cabinet dismissal, and the 1948 third-party candidacy did not detract from his high opinion of the man. To Hoover, whom Roosevelt spurned, Truman opened his arms. He gave the former executive respect, recognition, and responsibility commensurate with Hoover's talents.

Ferrell devotes nine of eighteen chapters to the presidency. Of these, four delineate the "new foreign policy," Truman's "principal accomplishment" (246). Ferrell designates the atomic bomb Truman's "most controversial decision," but feels it was a logical one given fears of additional U.S. and Japanese casualties and the heated emotional

climate of the time. He underscores Truman's oft-overlooked role in managing the Marshall Plan. By appointing Marshall, whom he considered the greatest man of his time, secretary of state, he ensured the plan's acceptance.

Similarly, Truman exercised a forceful hand in Korea to avoid a League of Nations-type failure. Ferrell uses newly released Soviet documents to clarify the Soviet role in the war's beginning. Yet the author feels Truman stumbled when he did not declare war and when he gave MacArthur permission to invade the North. Things then started to unravel as, according to General Ridgeway, MacArthur inexpertly deployed troops "like Custer" (325). The firing of General MacArthur, whom the president had referred to as "Mr. Prima Donna, Brass Hat, Five Star," was "not on the same scale" (330) as a policy mistake, yet it won Truman history's lowest public approval rating.

Ferrell's work could have benefitted from deeper congressional analysis of the failure of the Fair Deal; the challenges here are not presented as forcibly as those in foreign policy. While the author makes it clear that later successes in areas such as civil rights were largely due to Truman's initiative and vision in the 1940s, one must observe that if Truman's work with civil rights led to success, his concern for civil liberties did not. If his handling of railroad workers was adroit, that of steelworkers was not. If his support for Israeli independence was positive, his obfuscations with the RFC were not. Scandals, many of which seem minor today, and the odiferous presence of McCarthyism exacerbated these concerns. In the final evaluation, however, Truman's success with domestic policy lay in its future influence, just as his foreign policy set future standards.

Inevitably, Ferrell's *Harry Truman* will be compared with David McCullough's lengthy and successful popular history, *Truman*. At four hundred pages of text, Ferrell's book runs not much over one-third the length of McCullough's tome. There are times when succinct historical analysis is to be applauded by the reader. Such is the case with Ferrell's biography of the prairie president who has consistently been ranked among the handful of "near great" executives in this nation's history.

Protectors of the Land and Water: Environmentalism in Wisconsin, 1961-1968, by Thomas R. Huffman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. ix, 252 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

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Most history of post-World War II environmental affairs has been written in national terms. Yet even a cursory reading of the record makes clear that interest in such matters varied from state to state and

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