



From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War

By *Wilson D. Miscamble*

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On April 12, 1945, Franklin Roosevelt died and Harry Truman took his place in the White House. Historians have been arguing ever since about the implications of this transition for American foreign policy in general and relations with the Soviet Union in particular. Was there essential continuity in policy or did Truman's arrival in the Oval Office prompt a sharp reversal away from the approach of his illustrious predecessor? This study explores this controversial issue and in the process casts important light on the outbreak of the Cold War. From Roosevelt to Truman investigates Truman's foreign policy background and examines the legacy that FDR bequeathed to him. After Potsdam and the American use of the atomic bomb, both which occurred under Truman's presidency, the U.S. floundered between collaboration and confrontation with the Soviets, which represents a turning point in the transformation of American foreign policy. This work reveals that the real departure in American policy came only after the Truman administration had exhausted the legitimate possibilities of the Rooseveltian approach of collaboration with the Soviet Union.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This sane, brisk, and seasoned work refutes revisionists' accusations that Harry Truman plunged the United States into a cold war FDR would have avoided. Truman instead did his best to extend the legacy he inherited, then improved on it when he jettisoned FDR's "supine" trust of Stalin. The result was a diplomatic revolution that led eventually to victory in the cold war. At times, Miscamble takes no prisoners in dismissing revisionist indictments of Truman, but those who resist his analysis—especially of the bombing of Hiroshima—will find it difficult to evade the conclusions he reaches in this superbly written and unshakably candid reassessment of the American path to the cold war."

- Robert L. Beisner, Author of *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* and Professor Emeritus of History, American University

"With all that's been written about the early Cold War, one might think that there'd be little new to say about the Roosevelt-Truman transition. Bill Miscamble shows this not to be the case. His thoughtful and thoroughly researched book makes us see this familiar topic from a fresh point of view, so much so that despite knowing the outcome I found it difficult to put down. I know of no keener analysis of the issues involved, and no sharper portrait of the personalities who had to deal with them."

- John Lewis Gaddis, Yale University

"The sudden transition from Roosevelt to Truman has always fascinated Cold War historians, many of whom argue that it led to a provoking reversal in American foreign policy. Scholars will now have to reckon with Wilson Miscamble's well-written, finely-crafted study of Truman's baptism by fire. It is an unprecedentedly full account and a splendid exercise in clarification. In essence, it is a corrective to the 'reversal' thesis. Miscamble shows a well-intentioned, surprisingly patient President who certainly had trouble finding his feet as he faced the new problems created by the atomic bomb and tried to navigate between hard-line and accomodationist advisers. But Truman genuinely tried to follow Roosevelt's seemingly conciliatory line towards a Soviet Union whose policies, in the end, left him little alternative but a turn to resistance and thus to the Cold War. The attractive combination of rich detail, sharp insight and calm judgment make this, I believe, the best book on Truman's early diplomacy yet to appear."

- Fraser Harbutt, Emory University

"Bill Miscamble has written the definitive work on the complicated transition from Roosevelt to Truman and its impact on American foreign policy. Those who continue to make Yalta a political football would do well to read this book."

- Randall Woods, University of Arkansas

"In this remarkable book, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War*, Professor Wilson Miscamble has provided one of the most elegantly written and thorough studies of the most important presidential transition of the 20th century. Not only does the book refute numerous misconceptions about Truman's behavior and actions in this crucial period, but it is one of the very best treatments I have read of the use of the atomic bomb to end the war with Japan. Miscamble's careful and balanced portrayal of Harry Truman's efforts to follow the policies of his revered predecessor toward Josef Stalin's Soviet Union is also a devastating critique of that part of the Roosevelt legacy, and it is certain to trigger renewed debate on the origins of the Cold War."

- Thomas Alan Schwartz, Vanderbilt University

"Wilson Miscamble's impressively researched study is an important inquiry into the early cold war. A central

part of his argument is that there was great and unfortunate continuity between the Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman administrations until 1947."

- John T. McNay, University of Cincinnati

"In his study, Mr Miscamble provides an answer to the riddle of whether or not Harry Truman carried out Franklin Delano Roosevelt's wartime plans for peace after the latter's untimely death on April 12th 1945."

- The Economist

"From Roosevelt to Truman is an important contribution to the history of the origins of the Cold War."
Mary Glantz, The Journal of American History

"This is an excellent book that should reinvigorate the debate of the origins of the Cold War." -Ingo
Tauschweizer, H-War

"...this is an outstanding piece of work-detailed and well-written-and those who continue to explore the origins of the Cold War will have to contend with Miscamble's arguments." -Andrew Priest, International Affairs

About the Author

Wilson D. (Bill) Miscamble, C.S.C. was born in Roma, Australia and educated at the University of Queensland. He pursued graduate studies in history at the University of Notre Dame from where he received his doctorate in 1980. He then served for two years as North American Analyst in the Office of National Assessments, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, Australia. In August of 1982 he returned to Notre Dame and entered the priesthood formation program of the Congregation of Holy Cross of which he is now a member. He was ordained a priest in 1988 and has taught at Notre Dame since then. He chaired the History Department from 1993 to 1998. His book *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (1992) received the Harry S. Truman Book Award. He also has authored *Keeping the Faith, Making a Difference* (2000), and edited *American Political History: Essays on the State of the Discipline* (with John Marszalek, 1997), and *Go Forth and Do Good: Memorable Notre Dame Commencement Addresses* (2003). He also has published a number of articles, essays and reviews and received a number of awards for his teaching at Notre Dame.

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