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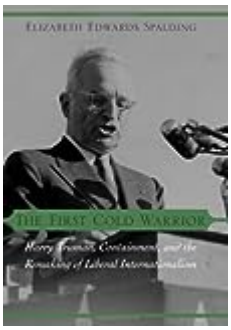

Elizabeth Edwards Spalding. *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006. ix + 323 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2392-9.

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Truman: Statesman and Strategist

"Harry Truman's Cold War was a conflict between good and evil, between freedom and tyranny, between liberal democracy and totalitarianism, between capitalism and communism" (p. 223). It is with this understanding, and within this context, that Elizabeth Edwards Spalding offers a reconsideration of the thirty-third president's role in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy early in the Cold War. In *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism*, Spalding argues that Truman was the most important figure in the policymaking process during the early years of the Soviet-American conflict, and that it was Truman–not his erstwhile advisors such as Dean Acheson, George Marshall, or George Kennan–who truly understood the nature of the Soviet threat and who conceived, developed, and implemented the strategy of containment.

Spalding believes that Truman's role in foreign policy has been overlooked, and that this has given historians and the general public a false impression of the president's understanding of foreign affairs, as well as of his conception of the United States' role in promoting peace and international understanding. Though certainly influenced by the idealistic internationalism of Woodrow Wilson and the pragmatic internationalism of Franklin Roosevelt, Truman's conception of liberal internationalism differed from that of his predecessors. He hoped for a post-World War II international order that promoted and protected the dignity and freedom of the individual, but he also understood that the Soviet Union posed a grave threat to this order. Where Wilson would have hoped to promote his international order through the League of Nations and the all-too-illusive moral power of mankind, Truman believed that collective security through international cooperation would be fruitless unless supported by force. Whereas FDR sought postwar cooperation with the Soviets in a type of spheres-of-influence arrangement among the Great Powers, it was clear to Truman that the Soviet Union had little interest in promoting American–and in Truman's eyes, universal–goals based in the freedom of the individual.

Although George Kennan is generally regarded as the originator of the policy of containment, Spalding argues that Truman's personal beliefs–based in his understand-

ing of history, religion, and power politics–led him to champion this approach before Kennan's famous Long Telegram or his "X article" in *Foreign Affairs*. It was Truman who early on advocated a "get tough" policy toward the Soviets, Spalding argues, as the Soviets repeated refused to live up to their wartime and postwar agreements regarding Eastern Europe. In Iran, Greece, Turkey, and Berlin, Truman feared that Joseph Stalin and the Soviets sought to spread their tyrannical system, and that the Soviets would not cease in their efforts to dominate the world unless they met a greater counter-force. Truman, who believed that the Soviets threatened the peace and freedom of all mankind as well as that of the United States, keenly appraised Soviet intentions, ideology, and power, and dedicated his administration and the entire country to containing the Soviet threat. Through his efforts to build a bipartisan foreign policy consensus, establish a powerful national security bureaucracy, and explain to the American public the necessity of the U.S. effort to stem the Soviet tide, Truman created not just a system capable of slowing and containing the Soviets, he also generated a greater national understanding of the importance of carrying on these efforts to create and preserve what he believed to be a true liberal international order.

The First Cold Warrior is a deftly written effort to correct what the author believes to be a serious miscalculation of the importance of Truman's legacy in foreign policy. Based on extensive primary research in archival holdings, and placed into some perspective by Spalding's elucidations of the secondary literature on the topic, the author has certainly provided a conceptually acceptable work. Truman inherited a very difficult set of circumstances when he ascended to the presidency in 1945, and the postwar issues became increasingly complex, and apparently dangerous, in the years following. In her efforts to convince the reader of Truman's rightful place in the annals of U.S. foreign policy, however, Spalding overreaches and the unfortunate casualty is her objectivity. The author's explanation of Truman's view of liberal internationalism is less an explanation of the president's understanding and philosophy than it is a justification of the policies Truman pursued early in the Cold War. Spalding often mentions that the promotion of "freedom" was the guiding principle of Truman's policies, but this term is so broad and vague that defies any concrete definition. Americans have had difficulty agreeing on the meaning of the term over the past 200-plus years, and to explain Truman's efforts to promote "freedom" from an American perspective, within foreign environments, and within the context of the Cold War is not a task that the author handles well.

Spalding also credits Truman for recognizing the dangers posed by communist ideology, and therefore for his efforts to wage the Cold War based on American ideological precepts. One does not have to be from the Realist school to recognize the dangers of waging an ideological conflict. Despite her considerable gifts as a researcher and writer, the author seems to lack an understanding of the nuance of the early Cold War, portraying it as a zero-sum conflict in which her protagonist, who promotes American ideals and freedom, must be correct in his policies and actions because the other side is unquestionably evil. Truman's approach, characterized by the Truman Doctrine and NSC-68, helped to increase–though by no means did it create–the lack of understanding between the two superpowers. Spalding's depiction of Kennan's role in the formulation of the containment policy is also lacking in a number of ways, leaving the reader to wonder, "If this is true, then why all the fuss about Kennan?"

A reevaluation of Truman's role in the Cold War is a welcome addition to the literature on the early years of the conflict. In a field such as diplomatic history, which is becoming increasingly dominated by the so-called culture vultures and world systems theorists, a political biography is a nice change of pace. The author would have been better served, however, to offer a reevaluation of Truman that includes some consideration of the influence of other actors, other states, and domestic politics on the formulation of foreign policy, as well as the shortcomings of these policies. It is also quite clear that by reassessing Truman's legacy in U.S. foreign relations, and by describing Truman's approach in the moralistic rhetoric of the Cold War, Spalding hopes to draw a parallel with the foreign policy legacy of George W. Bush. Her ardent and often heavy-handed defense of Truman is apparently meant to frame a future discussion of the successes of the Bush administration's policies in the war on terror. Perhaps the author might have avoided some of the weaknesses of the work had she focused on producing a more balanced account of Truman's policies, and let future generations of scholars deal with the legacy of President Bush.

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