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Harry S. Truman: The Unexpected President

Open-Ended Response Answer Key

1. Harry S. Truman's unexpected ascension to the presidency occurred in April 1945, following the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Truman faced the daunting task of leading the United States during the final stages of World War II. One of his most significant decisions was to authorize the dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This controversial decision ultimately led to Japan's surrender, effectively ending World War II. Truman's role in this decision and his leadership during this critical period remain a defining aspect of his presidency.
2. The Cold War during Harry S. Truman's presidency was marked by the tension and rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. This rivalry extended to global spheres of influence, with both superpowers seeking to expand their political and economic ideologies. Truman's response to these challenges included the Truman Doctrine, which aimed to contain the spread of communism. Additionally, he oversaw the implementation of the Marshall Plan, a program providing economic aid to help European nations recover from the devastation of World War II. The fear of nuclear conflict was pervasive during this period, with both the U.S. and the Soviet Union possessing atomic weapons. Truman's leadership during the early years of the Cold War played a critical role in shaping



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the United States' approach to international diplomacy and containment.

3. Harry S. Truman's contributions to civil rights were significant during his presidency. He issued executive orders to desegregate the military and end discrimination in federal employment. His Executive Order 9981, issued in 1948, mandated equal treatment and opportunity in the armed forces. These actions marked initial steps toward racial equality, and Truman's commitment to civil rights was evident. However, he faced opposition from some Southern politicians who resisted desegregation and civil rights advancements. Despite this opposition, Truman's support for civil rights was a pivotal moment in the early civil rights movement and set the stage for future advancements.
4. Harry S. Truman's legacy is enduring, shaped by his leadership during pivotal moments in history. His unexpected presidency saw him make crucial decisions regarding the end of World War II, including the use of atomic weapons. Truman's role in founding the United Nations and promoting international cooperation left a lasting impact on global diplomacy. Furthermore, his commitment to civil rights and desegregation represented a step toward racial equality in the United States, although it faced challenges and opposition. Truman's legacy is one of leadership, decisiveness, and a dedication to shaping the post-World War II world.

