

# Violence Made Truman Overcome Racist Roots

BY David Williamson  
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As a border state Democrat with strong ties to the old South, Harry Truman harbored deep-seated racial prejudices from childhood through much of his life, but he still made civil rights a concern of the American government for the first time since Reconstruction.

The South and the nation would never be the same.

Those are the conclusions Dr. William E. Leuchtenburg, William Rand Kenan professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, drew in an article about Truman for the November issue of *American Heritage* magazine.

"I think one man is just as good as another so long as he's honest and decent and not a nigger or a Chinaman," Truman wrote at age 27 to his future wife Bess in 1911.



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Harry S. Truman, 1911

"Uncle Will says that the Lord made a white man from dust, a nigger from mud, then He threw up what was left and it came down a Chinaman. He hates Chinese and Japs. So do I.

"It is race prejudice I guess," the

future president continued. "But I am strongly of the opinion that negros (sic) ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia and white men in Europe and America."

On Dec. 5, 1946, Truman demolished Southerners' confidence

in him by announcing creation of a President's Committee on Civil Rights, which he directed to look not only at violence, but also at the entire spectrum of civil rights.

Less than a year later, the committee reported finding a gaping disparity between the country's ideal of equality and its behavior that had resulted in "a kind of moral dry rot which eats away at the emotional and rational bases of democratic beliefs." It recommended sweeping reforms, ranging from enacting an anti-lynching statute and ending discrimination in the armed forces and federal agencies to denying federal money to any public or private program that persisted in Jim Crow practices.

"Once Truman set out on this new course he would not relent," Leuchtenburg wrote. "When Democratic leaders asked him to back down from his strong stand on civil

rights, he replied: 'My forebears were Confederates....Every factor and influence in my background — and in my wife's for that matter — would foster the personal belief that you are right.'

'But my very stomach turned over when I learned that Negro soldiers, just back from overseas, were being dumped out of Army tucks in Mississippi and beaten. Whatever my inclinations as a native of Missouri might have been, as President I know this is bad. I shall fight to end evils like this.'

An expanded version of Leuchtenburg's article, one of three Fleming Lectures in Southern History he delivered at Louisiana State University in April, will be published by LSU Press in his forthcoming book "Three 'Southern' Presidents."

## Incomplete Coverage Shows Mishandling of Sensitive Issue

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were against interracial dating, or explain why. Lee added that a significant portion of the story was cut in order to get more articles on that page. This is no excuse.

Did the edited portions include explanations for some black women's opposition to interracial dating? According to Lee, the omitted paragraphs did. Because these opinions are so vital for fair coverage, the article should have been rewritten to accommodate this information.

It is also questionable if the parts that were cut included essential information about white women who were against interracial dating. If they did, then perhaps this information should have been placed higher up in the story. Because this topic is especially sensitive on this campus, maybe the article should not have run without

it.

Furthermore, the poll cited in the article lacked essential facts. Who were the people polled? Because the article did not state whether or not the poll was random, it was unclear how the reporter obtained the information.

This article also lacked different perspectives from individuals who were not in interracial relationships. This would have made the story more balanced and fair. The fact that a lot of the opposition and criticism to interracial dating included in the article came from those involved in the relationships made portions of the story seem like hearsay or rumor.

Lee said the only individuals she was able to talk to were the persons already involved in interracial relationships. This may explain the narrow perspective that the ar-

ticle exhibited. If Lee had used more sources, the article would have provided a broader perspective.

Dating across racial lines is definitely a subject that needs to be discussed. With more sources, this article could have been a chance for blacks and whites to understand the reasons some are so opposed to interracial dating. Lee stressed that she definitely attempted to contact other sources but was unable to do so.

Such a sensitive topic deserves thorough, balanced coverage. With this in mind, the DTH can be a tool for a better understanding of minorities and others in this society.

Media Issues Committee writers were Stacey Belnavis and Tiffany Draughn.

### Clip and Save

#### HAIR TIPS

1. WASH HAIR WEEKLY.
2. CONDITION WITH MAYONNAISE MONTHLY.
3. COVER WITH TOWEL IN THE SHOWER.
4. TRIM ENDS MONTHLY.
5. BRUSH EACH NIGHT.
6. SEE SHURLI OFTEN.

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