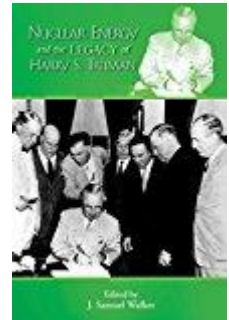


J. Samuel Walker, ed. *Nuclear Energy and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*. Truman Legacy Series. Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2016. 240 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-61248-159-3.



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This edited volume examines Harry S. Truman's atomic energy legacy. Edited by J. Samuel Walker, the former historian for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), it is the twelfth volume in the Truman Legacy series published by Truman State University Press. Much of the volume is dedicated to the atomic bombing of Japan and Truman's role in those events. Other essays offer a glimpse into the possibilities of nuclear history, detailing the politics of America's radioisotope program and the world's first research reactor not under national government control.

As Walker notes in his introduction, the atomic bombing of Japan has yielded a debate that ranks as "the most contentious in all of American history" (p. 3). Over seventy years later, scholars continue to unearth new sources, as Richard Frank does in this volume, further revealing the issue's complexity and the appeal of a "middle-ground persuasion" (p. 5). Frank's essay revisits questions explored in previous work (*Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* [1999]), but with the benefit of recently discovered archiv-

al documents and pathbreaking scholarship from the last decade.[1] Following this, Wilson Miscamble considers the morality of the atomic bombing, concluding with a call for "less moralizing condemnation" of Truman and perhaps for more empathy (p. 58). Another contributor, Robert S. Norris, questions whether the term "decision" accurately describes what transpired in July and August 1945, arguing that the very word "distorts the process by which the use of the bomb occurred" (p. 63). Norris emphasizes "sheer momentum" instead (p. 66). These contributions, while offering different insights into the debate, give readers a good sense of recent historiography and the major points of departure between scholars even today.

The volume's second half covers more diverse terrain and focuses on the postwar world. Historian Martin Melosi details the origins of the nuclear arms race in an effective, concise overview of a complicated subject. He argues that Truman's administration played a pivotal role in placing nuclear arms at the "center" of the Cold War, and Tru-

man's legacy served as the "benchmark" for "accepting a world dominated by two superpowers," each scaffolded by nuclear stockpiles (p. 100). Angela N. H. Creager then explores how radioisotopes produced for civilian use became "political instruments" (p. 108). In the 1940s and 1950s, the US Atomic Energy Commission's (AEC) radioisotope program stood at the forefront of government efforts to promote the peaceful atom and generated debates over scientific internationalism and national security. This addition is an important one, as Creager ably shows how the history of science can inform other fields, in this case, diplomatic and political history.

Historians of technology and energy, especially those interested in nuclear power, should read current NRC historian Thomas Wellock's contribution, which examines the world's first nuclear reactor not controlled by a national government. Constructed at North Carolina State University (NCSU), the Raleigh reactor launched the university's nuclear engineering program and promised trained professionals for defense installations and future nuclear power plants located in the US South. State and university officials also viewed atomic energy as one way to overhaul the region's higher education system.

Like Creager, Wellock documents a moment of transition, where secrecy gave way to greater declassification, and the AEC grappled with its role as atomic energy promoter and regulator. Even as the AEC shared technical information for engineering purposes, guidance on operational safety was "limited" (p. 147). Inadequate guidance, budget issues, internal disputes, the "controversial leadership" of reactor director Clifford Beck, and "overburdened" faculty contributed to the reactor's plagued beginnings (pp. 147, 167). It served as a cautionary tale for operating research reactors on college campuses. While Wellock rightly notes that NCSU's research reactor demonstrated how federal support could "lift southern higher education out of the doldrums," the motivations for the

region's interest in nuclear projects were manifold (p. 147). Beyond economic considerations and a desire to achieve equal footing in higher education, atomic energy offered symbolic possibilities for a region increasingly scrutinized for its defense of Jim Crow segregation and white supremacy. And yet, symbolic possibilities were often tempered by technological realities, as Wellock demonstrates, and he provides a compelling case study in the regulation of nuclear power.

The volume ends with William Lanouette's thoughtful concluding remarks and Randy Sowell's graphic essay featuring documents from Harry Truman's papers. This inclusion, along with the others, makes this volume well suited for the classroom. Despite its broad appeal, environmental history is largely overlooked, even though several contributors and Walker have devoted considerable attention to the environment elsewhere. To be sure, Martin Melosi acknowledges the impact of nuclear testing on human health and environment in this volume, and a fifth volume, edited by Karl Boyd Brooks, examining Truman's environmental legacy acknowledges these effects as well (*The Environmental Legacy of Harry S. Truman* [2009]). However, those implications beg for more attention in an additional chapter. Considering the staggering environmental consequences of the nuclear arms race, an evaluation of Truman's atomic legacy seems incomplete without a sustained discussion of the Cold War's imprint on the planet. Still, this volume gives readers a varied, rich distillation of Truman's atomic legacy and provides valuable insight for historians in many different fields.

Note

[1]. For recent work, see especially Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000); Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cam-

bridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

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