

Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986

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Looks at the life and work of the financier and politician, describing his privileged upbringing, his business success, and his tenure as governor of New York

An absorbing account of the life of W. Averill Harriman, one of that remarkable group of "wise men" whose lives were so closely linked to the foreign policy of the postwar US as it emerged to world power; by a Washington correspondent for the Los Angeles Times. Harriman was the son of Edward Henry Harriman, one of the great railroad pioneers--some say robber barons--of the Victorian era. For much of his life, he lived in the shadow of his father, and--though Abramson does not say so directly--his efforts as international banker, railroad executive, early pioneer of aviation, and assembler of America's largest merchant fleet hardly showed the remarkable prescience that characterized his father's reign; moreover, in the Soviet Union during the 1920's and early 30's, Harriman was taken for a ride in business dealings. It may have been his lack of financial acumen that drove him into politics; in any case, FDR found this former Republican a useful weapon against the outraged financial community. Harriman's most glorious days came during WW II, initially as Lend Lease administrator in London, where he worked closely with Churchill to bring the US into the war. Later, this taciturn, often inarticulate man served as ambassador to Moscow and, in the 1950's, as a one-term governor of New York. In the 1960's, Harriman negotiated the neutralization of Laos and headed the American delegation seeking peace with North Vietnam. Abramson deals frankly with Harriman's contributions; his stinginess; his years as a playboy and his adulterous affair with Pamela Churchill, whom he later married; and his sycophantic, even groveling attempts to curry favor with successive Presidents and to secure interesting diplomatic and other assignments. An unusual perspective that conveys an impression sometimes closer to the court intrigues of the past than to the supposedly more rational politics of the present. (Sixteen pages of b&w photographs--not seen.) -- Copyright © 1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. Short-tempered, humorless, intolerant and not especially articulate, Harriman nevertheless made himself useful to several presidents as an expediter, fixer and diplomat. Best remembered as FDR's wartime emissary to Churchill and Stalin, he went on to serve as secretary of commerce under Truman and roving ambassador under Kennedy and Johnson. He was governor of New York from 1954 to 1958, and an unsuccessful candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1956. In this authorized, deeply researched and candid biography, Los Angeles Times reporter Abramson presents new material on Harriman's difficult relationship with his father (railroad baron E. H. Harriman), his struggle to overcome shyness and stuttering, his formative experiences at Groton and Yale, his business career and management of the Harriman fortune, his adventures as an international polo star, his three marriages and, late in life, his central role in concluding a nuclear test-ban treaty with the Soviets. Abramson succeeds in bringing this enigmatic figure, one of the most important of the Cold Warriors, to vivid, three-dimensional life. Photos.

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Other Books

Truman and the Democratic Party. What best defines a Democrat in the American political arena--idealistic reformer or pragmatic politician? Harry Truman adopted both roles and in so doing defined the nature of his presidency. Truman and the Democratic Party is the first book to deal exclusively with the president's relationship with the Democratic party and his status as party leader. Sean J. Savage addresses Truman's twin roles of party regular and liberal reformer, examining the tension that arose from this duality and the

consequences of that tension for Truman's political career. Truman saw the Democratic party change during his lifetime from a rural-dominated minority party often lacking a unifying agenda to an urban-dominated majority party with strong liberal policy objectives. A seasoned politician who valued party loyalty and recognized the value of political patronage, Truman was also attracted to a liberal ideology that threatened party unity by alienating southern Democrats. By the time he succeeded Franklin Roosevelt, the diversity of opinions and demands among party members led Truman to alternate between two personas: the reformer committed to liberal policy goal—civil rights, national health insurance, federal aid to education—and the party regular who sought greater harmony among fellow Democrats. Drawing on personal interview with former Truman administration members and party officials and on archival materials—most notably papers of the Democratic National Committee at the Harry S. Truman Library—Savage has produced a fresh perspective that is both shrewd and insightful. This book offers historians and political scientists a new way of looking at the Truman administration and its impact on key public policies.

⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ . Hechler, *Working with Truman*, 242-43; and HST, *Memoirs*, 2:553-54, 229. ... Hamby, *Man of the People*, 602; and Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 464-65, 242."