

## Source 1

[Oral History Interview with Charles S. Murphy](#): Administrative Assistant to the President of the United States, 1947-50; and Special Counsel to the President, 1950-53. Washington, DC. June 3, 1963. C.T. Morrissey.

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MORRISSEY: Would you receive your assignments directly from the President?

MURPHY: A great many of them. Others would just develop in the normal course of business.

MORRISSEY: Did you attend the President's staff meeting?

MURPHY: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me something about how this meeting was conducted?

MURPHY: I could. When I first went there as an administrative assistant to the President, it was not customary at that time, for administrative assistants to attend the staff meetings. They did so only occasionally and then only when they were asked to come because they had some special business to take up. After I had been there a number of months, I was invited frequently enough so that Matt Connelly who looked after such matters said that I might as well come to all the meetings because I was there most of the time anyway. This was, I think, substantially, an opening wedge and before long other administrative assistants began to come more and more; and finally, I think, all administrative assistants to the President came regularly to the staff meetings.

The staff meetings were held fairly early in the morning, about 9:30 as I remember, and lasted usually only a half an hour, and the President went around the staff rather quickly to see if they had anything to mention quickly. It was understood that this was not a time and place to bring up matters that required lengthy discussion.

Each member of the staff had a particular seat that he usually sat in. I don't remember now where they all were, but I recall Charlie Ross always sat at the end of the desk on the President's left; John Steelman always pulled up a chair directly across the desk facing the President; Bill Hassett sat in one of the chairs by the wall around to the President's left; Clifford, as I recall, always sat next to Hassett; I sat on the sofa on the President's right. I don't remember all the others at the moment. The President kept on his desk a folder with tabs on it--names of various staff members and he would, during the day, put papers in this folder to be handed to staff members at the meetings, so he regularly went through that to see what was in it and passed it out. There was usually some brief discussion of his appointments for the day and instructions for the rest of us for the day.

MORRISSEY: When the President handed out an assignment to somebody in this meeting, would he mention when he would like to have a report back or would he allow the particular administrative assistant to finish the report regardless of how much time it took?

MURPHY: I don't remember that he ordinarily said anything about when he wanted the report back.

## Using Source 1

<b>Sourcing Questions:</b>	What was Charles Murphy's role within the Truman Administration? How might the fact that this source is an oral history affect its reliability?
<b>Contextualization Questions</b>	What challenges did Truman face during his presidency? Who are the other people mentioned in this source? Why might they be present at Truman's staff meeting? What is the role of the staff in an administration as opposed to cabinet members?
<b>Corroboration Tasks</b>	What does this source include that the others in this set do not? Is Murphy's tone similar to or different from other oral histories in this set?
<b>Close Reading Questions</b>	What specific actions taken by Truman are mentioned in this source? How would those actions assist President Truman in his job?

## Source 2

[Oral History Interview with George M. Elsey](#): Assistant to the Special Counsel to the President, 1947-49; Administrative Assistant to the President, 1949-51; Assistant to the Director, Mutual Security Agency, 1951-53. July 10, 1969.

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MORRISSEY: Could you tell me what kind of man Mr. Truman was as President?

ELSEY: He was, as I'm sure you know, an extremely thoughtful, courteous, considerate man. He was a pleasure to work for. He was very kindly in his dealings with staff members--I speak, of course, as a junior staff member. When he first began to be conscious of me as an individual by name and face, I was still a young Naval Reserve officer in uniform. . . . From those early times, right on through to the end of his administration, he was unfailingly thoughtful and kind.

He was never too busy to think about the members of his staff. These are the comments that I suppose are traditionally and tritely said about all Presidents, but, somehow I think, in Mr. Truman's case, they happen to be true and I've seen enough of some other Presidents over there to know that they're not quite so true as they are in his case.

He had an interesting faculty, which I was particularly conscious of, having studied history--and which he would sometimes talk with me about on these weekends at the *Williamsburg*, at Key West or elsewhere--of detaching himself from the Presidency itself. He had a tremendous veneration and respect for the institution of the Presidency. He demanded at all times respect for the President of the United States. He didn't demand any respect at all for Harry S. Truman; he demanded respect for the President of the United States.

He could see himself and the President as two different objects. He could stand aside and talk about the President as though the President were something entirely different. He would speculate aloud about what should the President do. "What do you think the President ought to do?" He wouldn't be asking what I ought to do, but what should the President do. And, he'd try to stand back and look at the Presidency and see what the President ought to do rather than what he, as a man should do.

This has its virtues and its admirable characteristics. It sometimes, however, I think led him into some of the more embarrassing situations that he got into. Because sometimes he would behave as Harry S. Truman, forgetting that the rest of the country couldn't make this differentiation that he could between the man and the office. When he would write a boiling, hot letter to a music critic or would call Drew Pearson a "son-of-a-bitch"--which I happen to think he is--he was behaving as Harry S. Truman, not as President of the United States. But, of course, other people couldn't see that and this caused embarrassment to him and I think reflected on the Office, which, of course, is the last thing in the world, he wanted to have happen.

This was also true in his continued association with some people, some individuals. He had an intense loyalty to old friends who'd stood by him through thick and thin and he was determined to stand with them. This was notable from the, really the earliest weeks of his being President. He flew out to Kansas City to attend the funeral of "Boss" Pendergast and was soundly criticized for that. His reply was that Pendergast had been a friend of his.

He never changed this behavior pattern throughout his administration. If somebody had been a friend of his and had stood by him when he needed help, he would stand by that man or woman, when he or she needed his help.

I don't know how one handles a situation like this. I suppose a President has to be cruel and hard-blooded at times and cold-blooded and cast friends aside. Mr. Truman, somehow, didn't have that element of cruelty and he couldn't quite cast aside some people that probably, from the point of view of the Presidency, he might well have managed to find another role for.

## Using Source 2

<b>Sourcing Questions</b>	What was George Elsey's role within the Truman Administration? How might the fact that this source is an oral history affect its reliability?
<b>Contextualization Questions</b>	What challenges did Truman face during his presidency? Who was "Boss Pendergast?" What was Truman's connection with him?
<b>Corroboration Tasks</b>	What does this source include that the others in this set do not? Is Elsey's tone similar to or different from other oral histories in this set?
<b>Close Reading Questions</b>	What personality or character traits are mentioned about Truman are mentioned in this source? How would those traits assist or complicate President Truman's job as president? What is the significance of mentioning Truman's separation of himself and the office of President?

### Source 3

[Oral History Interview with Clark M. Clifford](#) Assistant to White House Naval Aide, 1945-46; Special Counsel to the President, 1946-50. Washington, D.C. February 14, 1973. Jerry N. Hess

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HESS: On the subject of Mr. Truman's Cabinet, what did Mr. Truman see as the proper role of his Cabinet? Were they his principal advisers on all matters, or on some matters, or just what was their role?

CLIFFORD: Different Presidents use Cabinets in different ways. I believe that President Truman used his Cabinet in two ways: one, they were his specific representatives in the various departments, which it was their administrative responsibility to conduct. And then from time to time matters of broad general interest would be presented for discussion so that he might get, if possible, some thrust of agreement in general areas. He did not use his Cabinet as a board of directors. I understand that to a certain extent President Eisenhower used his Cabinet as part of the policy-making machinery. President Truman did not use his Cabinet that way. He understood that that was not the function of the Cabinet under our governmental system. The Cabinet as a group has no power. It does not even have any existence in our law. It is just a term that's been applied to a group of men who happen to be appointed to specific positions.

President Truman was very much aware of the lack of power of the Cabinet. ... He would not call the Cabinet to discuss important specific problems. At Cabinet meetings he oftentimes would start discussions which would give him a general feeling of their attitude toward matters; but he did not depend on them as a policymaking body, nor did he assign any responsibility in that regard to his Cabinet.

HESS: We hear today of occasions when White House staff members interpose themselves between the President and his Cabinet members. Were there similar actions attempted by any staff members during the Truman administration?

CLIFFORD: I doubt that one could say that staff members would interpose themselves. President Truman used his staff a great deal. He developed a good feel for the kind of contribution that his staff could make. He was closer to his staff than any President that I know. As an illustration, I believe President Truman was the only President who took his vacation with his staff. Other Presidents would take their personal friends and might even prefer as part of the relaxation to get away from their staff. President Truman was comfortable with the staff, he used them well. . .

There would be times when staff members would differ with Cabinet members. It is good for a President to hear different views. Maybe we touched one time earlier on a dramatic meeting that I remember when Secretary of State George Marshall came over with Lovett and we had a conference on whether or not our Government should recognize Israel. We had very sharp differences of opinion. There is one comment also that I think has value: the President learned so much as his Presidency progressed. At the very beginning, I believe he accepted as *carte blanche* representations or recommendations from his Cabinet members, and sometimes got into trouble by doing so. You remember the Henry Wallace incident, and the speech in Madison Square Garden which must have been back in . . . September of '46. After some experiences of that kind President Truman would many times have Cabinet officers submit recommendations in the form of a memorandum. Then he would have the staff go over the memorandum almost from the standpoint of presenting the other side of the issue. So, there began, I think in the Truman administration, a

system whereby certain staff members developed relationships with certain departments which made the machinery operate more smoothly.

### Using Source 3

<b>Sourcing Questions</b>	What was Clark Clifford's role within the Truman Administration? How might the fact that this source is an oral history affect its reliability?
<b>Contextualization Questions</b>	What challenges did Truman face during his presidency? Why might Clifford compare Truman's presidency with Eisenhower's? What happened in the meeting between Truman and George Marshall? Why might that be significant enough to mention in this source?
<b>Corroboration Tasks</b>	What does this source include that the others in this set do not? Is Clifford's tone similar to or different from other oral histories in this set? How does this comment about George Wallace compare with the documents in document set #2? How does this source shed new light on that event?
<b>Close Reading Questions</b>	What specific actions taken by Truman are mentioned in this source? How would those actions assist President Truman in his job? What does this source say about how Truman viewed his cabinet? Why is that significant? To what extent did Cabinet members influence Truman's decision-making? How do you know?

#### Source 4

[Oral History Interview with Matthew J. Connelly](#): Appointments Secretary to the President, 1945-53. New York, NY. November 28, 1967. Jerry N. Hess

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HESS: Any other duties? I know you had many and they were varied.

CONNELLY: Yes, well, I attended all the Cabinet meetings.

HESS: Tell me about that.

CONNELLY: Well, I'd make longhand notes, and it was suggested, I believe, by Jimmy Forrestal, who was then Secretary of the Navy and later Secretary of Defense, that we should have a shorthand report on Cabinet meetings, what each fellow said, period. So Truman suggested that to me and I said, "No. You have found out now that Roosevelt never really had Cabinet meeting. He would hold a meeting but members would not talk in front of other members, because he played one against the other so they'd go around the other way and talk to him personally. But if you have a record of what's going on in the Cabinet, they're not going to speak for that record, where if they could speak off the cuff, they will say more and you will have closer cooperation between them," and he agreed. So I took just longhand notes like, "Forrestal took this position," and so forth. He'd go around the table, always in the same order, he'd go from his left around to his right.

HESS: Did you sit in on all of the Cabinet meetings for Mr. Truman's full period of his administration?

CONNELLY: With a few exceptions.

HESS: And those are the notes that you tell me that are now out at the Truman Library, is that right?

CONNELLY: That's right, but not in the Library, according to what Dr. Brooks told me. They're in Mr. Truman's personal possession.

HESS: How did President Truman look upon the Cabinet? Just what did he think the duty of a Cabinet was? Were the Cabinet members his principal advisers or did he have other advisers in regular Government agencies that he would place as much or more credibility on their advice as he would a member of the Cabinet?

CONNELLY: No, definitely not. Each Cabinet member was responsible for his own department, and whatever came from that department to the President came through the Cabinet member. He never used anybody to undermine any Cabinet member. When he appointed them he said, "This is your job, you're not going to have any interference; you run it, period. You can pick your own people."

#### Source 5

[Oral History Interview with Matthew J. Connelly](#): Appointments Secretary to the President, 1945-53. New York, NY. August 21, 1968. Jerry N. Hess

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HESS: I think we have touched upon some of those in our previous interviews. That is all the questions that I have on the Cabinet. Do you have anything else you'd like to say concerning the Cabinet?

CONNELLY: Well, when President Truman took over, it was very soon apparent that a Cabinet meeting under Roosevelt was practically a nothing. The members of the Cabinet all suspected each other, and Roosevelt played one against the other, with the result that nobody would talk openly, or one of the other members would go out and get it planted in a news story. Well that was not Truman's method of operation, and he wanted a team. And gradually he changed the whole pattern of Cabinet meetings to make it open discussion and that's what he wanted. And if there was a difference of opinion between members they would bring it up at the Cabinet meeting, not go behind the door and try to get the President's ear personally.

## Using Sources 4 & 5

<b>Sourcing Questions</b>	What was Matthew Connelly's role within the Truman Administration? How might the fact that this source is an oral history affect its reliability?
<b>Contextualization Questions</b>	What challenges did Truman face during his presidency? Who are the individuals mentioned in this source? Why would Connelly mention the Roosevelt Administration in this source?
<b>Corroboration Tasks</b>	What does this source include that the others in this set do not? Is Connelly's tone similar to or different from other oral histories in this set?
<b>Close Reading Questions</b>	What specific actions taken by Truman are mentioned in this source? How would those actions assist President Truman in his job? What does this source say about how Truman viewed his cabinet? Why is that significant? To what extent did Cabinet members influence Truman's decision-making? How do you know?