



December 2020

### Eisenhower: From “Do-Nothing” to “Did-Everything”

Holly F. Caldwell  
*Cedarville University*, [hollyfcaldwell@cedarville.edu](mailto:hollyfcaldwell@cedarville.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/channels>



Part of the [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

DigitalCommons@Cedarville provides a publication platform for fully open access journals, which means that all articles are available on the Internet to all users immediately upon publication. However, the opinions and sentiments expressed by the authors of articles published in our journals do not necessarily indicate the endorsement or reflect the views of DigitalCommons@Cedarville, the Centennial Library, or Cedarville University and its employees. The authors are solely responsible for the content of their work. Please address questions to [dc@cedarville.edu](mailto:dc@cedarville.edu).

#### Recommended Citation

Caldwell, Holly F. (2020) "Eisenhower: From “Do-Nothing” to “Did-Everything”," *Channels: Where Disciplines Meet*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.15385/jch.2020.5.1.3

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/channels/vol5/iss1/3>

---

# Eisenhower: From “Do-Nothing” to “Did-Everything”

## Abstract

Dwight David Eisenhower was a modest man who led a modest life. The 34<sup>th</sup> president of the United States was a country boy who hailed from the rural town of Abilene, Kansas. He was not born into instant greatness; instead, he grew into it. He held several notable positions, culminating in the achievement of being elected to the presidency. His presidential reign was relatively calm, with few drastic disruptions, and this period of tranquility led to a public perception of Eisenhower as a “do-nothing” president.

Contrary to the traditional portrayal, historical revisionism has exhibited Eisenhower as an experienced and subtly adept politician. A multitude of primary and secondary resources, including diaries and documents, the testimonies of friends and family, and his international and domestic political legacies, display that he was intimately involved in every aspect of his presidency. The evidence strips Eisenhower of the “do-nothing” label and proves him to be a president who “did-everything.” This paper strives to give a brief yet thorough overview of the man, leader, and politician that Eisenhower truly was, while addressing previous misconceptions.

## Keywords

Eisenhower, President, historical revisionism, military, World War II, John Foster Dulles, Sherman Adams, foreign affairs, Korea, Cold War, domestic tensions, Civil Rights movement, Little Rock, International Highway System

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

# Eisenhower: From “Do-Nothing” to “Did-Everything”

Holly Caldwell

*History and Government*

## Introduction

**T** When the word “revisionism” is put forth within a historical context, the reaction is often negative. There are many reasons historians are often not thrilled with proposed changes to the orthodox historical record – too often, the revisionist theories and ideas circulated are attempts to update or merge the historical record with themes and values upheld by the present culture. The attempt to impose contemporary narratives on the account of the past is ultimately a harmful endeavor, for it modifies history in such a way as to make it applicable only to the current context. In doing so, valuable experiences and knowledge are lost from the recounting of the original past and transformed into strained and artificially drawn conclusions that are then applied to present reality. This is the negative side of revisionism.

However, make no mistake. Despite the somewhat stereotypical shudder that accompanies a historian hearing the term “revisionism,” there are occasions where such work is warranted. To guard against the portrayal of revisionism as evil incarnate, it is necessary to admit that there have been many instances where revisionism has been a positive good in history. The positive side of revisionism works to correct the errors in the historical record, replacing ingrained falsehoods with evidentiary-proven truths. One such example involves the accounting and perception of the presidency of Dwight David Eisenhower.

While he was in office, Eisenhower oversaw a portion of American history that is typically classified as “peaceful, prosperous, and predictable.”<sup>1</sup> The years following World War II were calm. The American people were ready to rest, to settle back into the routines and rhythms of daily life in the United States. It was a time where people yearned for tranquility. There was a general longing to have a family, hold a steady job, and tend to life as it happened. With the prospect of war banished from the horizon, it appeared as though people were finally able to resume their respective versions of normality.

Looking at his presidency from the outside, a peaceful America is what Eisenhower presided over as chief of state. He facilitated what Americans asked for – a stable nation that kept to the middle of the road politically and stayed out of conflict internationally. The irony of the situation is that critics of Eisenhower and his administration would use the

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, “Eisenhower Revisionism: A Decade of Scholarship,” *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 1 (1993): 98, accessed March 20, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/24912261](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24912261).

existence of the peace and quiet the nation was experiencing as evidence of a lazy and inattentive president. Some would portray this calm period as “ow[ing] little to his leadership,” perceiving Eisenhower as a “bumbling and genial figure.”<sup>2</sup> Others would use this record to accuse him of blundering his way through his two terms or assert that he simply enjoyed “eight long years of golfing and goofing.”<sup>3</sup> Popular opinion and contemporary analysis of Eisenhower during his presidency categorized him largely as a “do-nothing” president, who was content to let his assistants speak and act for him.

As history would later begin to see and prove, however, this conception of Eisenhower was flawed. The release of his private papers in the 1970s helped to begin to turn the tide on this negative assessment of him and his presidential administration, as they proved that he was quite the adept politician, and was far more involved in the politics of his position than he portrayed while in office. Since then, the presidency of Dwight David Eisenhower has been subject to in-depth historical study, which has simultaneously served to produce a more accurate version of events and set the historical record straight as it concerns Eisenhower’s presidency, administration, and personal involvement.

This paper relies on the efforts and publications of many other historians of similar interest, who have contributed to the reshaping and rebuilding of the character of President Eisenhower in the public eye. The general public remains unaware of the shift that has taken place with reference to this subject, but this paper strives to give a brief, yet thorough, overview of the man, leader, and politician Eisenhower was. It will prove that, contrary to the historically contemporaneous image of Eisenhower as a “do-nothing” or “caretaker” president, the records of various documents and papers, his colleagues, and the legacy of his international and domestic policies and actions testify that Eisenhower was in fact a deft politician and shrewd president.

## Eisenhower: The Man, The Myth, The Legend

### Background

David Dwight Eisenhower was born in Texas on October 14, 1890, to David and Ida Eisenhower. His names were later reversed by his mother, for two reasons: first, she did not care for nicknames (and Dwight is not a name that can be shortened, try as some might), and second, it was confusing to have two Davids in the family.<sup>4</sup> He was the third of seven sons, and spent his childhood in Abilene, Kansas. He grew up in a family that was

---

<sup>2</sup> Andrew J. Polsky, ed., *The Eisenhower Presidency: Lessons for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent P. De Santis, “Eisenhower Revisionism,” *The Review of Politics* 38, no. 2 (1976): 197, accessed March 20, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/1405936](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1405936); for further support, refer to news publications of that time by either Richard Rovere of *The New Yorker* or the *New York Times*’ Arthur Krock.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 1 - Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 18.

quite poor, and though their life was not lavish or easy, Dwight's family fostered "the simple virtues of honesty, self-reliance, integrity, fear of God, and ambition."<sup>5</sup> Ida and David lived lives that emphasized the opportunities and accomplishments to be found in America – lives that were relatively simple and unquestioning, yet open to possibilities.

They ingrained in each of their seven sons a strong emphasis on the virtues of hard work and ability, and frequently speculated about the different prospects their futures could hold. Abilene was a town not markedly divided by wealth or social status, but there were small differences by which one could tell another's station in life. One of Eisenhower's lifelong friends, Everett E. Hazlett ("Swede"), would later say of Abilene that "there was never any difference between 'north of the tracks' and 'south of the tracks,'" but this was not true.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the veil of childhood innocence equalizes all in nostalgic memory, but there were differences in Abilene. The Eisenhowers lived on the south side of the tracks, which was the purported "wrong" side. It was the poorer area of town, and perhaps generally looked down upon by more affluent residents, but such distinctions did not matter to the two young boys. Their childhood town was remembered with great fondness and viewed as a place where people were judged "by how hard he worked and... by how well she ran her household."<sup>7</sup> This upbringing and mindset contributed to the self-sufficient and personally motivated person that Dwight D. Eisenhower would later be known as.

As Eisenhower grew up, he was dubbed "Little Ike" – the "Ike" came from the first syllable of Eisenhower, and "Little" was employed to distinguish him from his older brother Edgar, who was known as "Big Ike."<sup>8</sup> He was a scrapper, shown by the fact that he somehow got into a fight nearly every day at school. His fighting spirit partly came from an anti-authoritarian complex stemming from a "difficult life with his father and his seemingly endless, losing competition with Ed," and partly from the natural spunkiness of a child.<sup>9</sup> His natural interest in the world of academics lay in the area of history, particularly military history. In high school he was a good student and was naturally able to attain good grades without expending a great deal of effort. This natural talent served him well later, when he entered a competitive examination to gain entrance to a service academy (namely, either Annapolis or West Point).<sup>10</sup> He placed second in the competition, and thus was appointed to West Point. He took the entrance examination, passed, and left for the academy in June of 1911.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Griffith, ed., *Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941-1958* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 1*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Galambos, *Eisenhower: Becoming the Leader of the Free World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 1*, 40.

Acclaimed historian Stephen E. Ambrose describes Eisenhower at West Point as “[taking] from West Point what was positive and reject[ing] that which was negative.”<sup>11</sup> He generally enjoyed and thrived during his time there, gathering many stories that he would later enjoy retelling. He was very involved in sports, extracurricular activities, getting in and out of various sundry scrapes, and remaining comfortably in the middle of his class in terms of academic achievement. While it was a positive time for him overall, Eisenhower did have some rough experiences. He had to adjust to a school structure that emphasized obedience to authority above all else and suffered disappointing physical injuries that temporarily derailed his ability to play football.<sup>12</sup> These obstacles were not insurmountable, however, and “Little Ike” (though not so little anymore) graduated from West Point in June of 1915, and received his orders to report to the 19th Infantry Regiment at Fort Sam Houston. That November, he went off to San Antonio, Texas, to begin his military adventure.

## Military Career

Eisenhower was stationed at Fort Sam for roughly two years. During those two years, he met and married his wife, Mary (Mamie) Geneva Doud, coached football, and excelled in his assignments. Due to his previous coaching and teamwork experiences, he was called upon to use his skills as a trainer in the Army. Ike was driven by the “need to excel.”<sup>13</sup> He once remarked that he was self-required “to perform every duty given me in the Army to the best of my ability and to do the best I could to make a creditable record, no matter what the nature of the duty.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, he undertook training his fellow soldiers with zeal, despite the assignment being far from his first choice, and was promoted to the rank of captain. Though seeming to do well, Eisenhower still struggled intensely with submitting to the authority over him versus exercising his own desires and individuality. This conflict would continue to cause internal tension within himself for the next several years of his military career, for he seemed to still be “rebell[ing] unconsciously against a father and older brother who had saddled him with a deep streak of discontent about authority.”<sup>15</sup>

The United States entered World War I in April of 1917. Eisenhower had a burning desire to get overseas and applied for overseas duty repeatedly, hoping to receive a placement in France. Instead, Ike received a reprimand from the War Department citing that they “did not approve of young officers applying for special duty; they were to obey orders and, in effect, let the War Department run the war.”<sup>16</sup> His dreams were dashed. Over the next few months, he was shuffled from place to place – first to Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia, then Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, and then to Camp Meade in Maryland. Through it all, he kept the

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Galambos, *Eisenhower*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Lyon, *Eisenhower: Portrait of a Hero* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Galambos, *Eisenhower*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Merle Miller, *Ike the Soldier: As They Knew Him* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1987), 167.

desire to see overseas action alive, but determined also to see his duties through faithfully; he continued to complete the tasks he was given with excellence.

At Camp Meade he was responsible for training the 301st Tank Battalion to prepare them for deployment overseas. In March of 1918, he was told that the 301st would soon deploy, under his command. Eisenhower's overseas dream was alive again, for he was to be sent to France. However, hardly had the Army brought up his hopes before they shot them down. Higher authorities decided Eisenhower was too valuable a trainer to let go, so while the 301st packed and left for France, Eisenhower was given orders to transfer to Camp Colt, Pennsylvania, to command the training of the Tank Corps.<sup>17</sup>

The transfer came with a promotion to the rank of major, but it was little consolation to Eisenhower. Nonetheless, he undertook his new assignment with gusto, and per his usual record, achieved great things at Camp Colt. After a time of service there, which resulted in yet another promotion (this time to lieutenant colonel), Ike was elated to finally receive orders for overseas duty. He rushed home to Mamie, and told his wife that he was to report to Camp Dix in New Jersey to deploy on November 18, 1918. Unfortunately for Eisenhower, his greatest disappointment was yet to come. One week before he was supposed to go to Europe, WWI ended with the formal signing of the Armistice.<sup>18</sup> He was "deflated and depressed."<sup>19</sup> His dream to serve overseas had been squashed once again – for what he assumed would be the rest of his life.

Despite the personal disappointment, the years of being transferred from camp to camp were far from useless or wasted. In hindsight, Eisenhower had developed and honed essential skills that would later serve him well. His future positions would greatly benefit from this time of learning and bettering himself as a leader. It was also during this span of time that he was nominated for and received the Distinguished Service Medal. In 1919, "Colonel Ira C. Welborn recommended him for the DSM... [which] finally came through in 1922."<sup>20</sup> It was awarded for "his unusual zeal, foresight, and marked administrative ability" during the time of war.<sup>21</sup> Though Eisenhower was very honored, he was not as glad to receive it as one might expect. For him, it was a reminder of what he had not done – serve overseas. Though not overtaken by bitterness, it was a time of great disappointment in his life.

Over the span of the next several decades, Eisenhower remained in service to the Army, serving under a series of "domineering generals."<sup>22</sup> The first in this series was General Fox Connor, whom Eisenhower served under as executive officer from 1922 to 1924 in the Panama Canal Zone. During this three-year span, Connor mentored and taught Ike about

---

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Perret, *Eisenhower* (New York: Random House, 1999), 67.

<sup>18</sup> Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life in Brief," Miller Center, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/life-in-brief>.

<sup>19</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 1*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 73.

military history and theory, grooming him to lead in the “great war” that would unavoidably come within Eisenhower’s lifetime.<sup>23</sup> Connor was convinced that Eisenhower was just the person to “provide the strong leadership required” in the inevitable conflict.<sup>24</sup> He would be proven right. Connor was also the man who would help Eisenhower reconcile his struggle with submitting to authority with his ability to succeed within the structure of the Army.<sup>25</sup>

Fox Connor went so far in his efforts to train Eisenhower as to arrange an appointment for him as a student at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas after his tenure in Panama.<sup>26</sup> The College was known for being among the most difficult of its kind, but despite its intimidating reputation, Eisenhower flourished there. He ended up graduating first in his class of 245.<sup>27</sup> It is common knowledge that Ike referred to that school as a watershed in his life, for it ingrained in him the “rewards of remaining calm as the pressure increases, a reaffirmation of the importance in a large organization of common sense over cleverness and an appreciation that even at the higher levels of command nothing could be accomplished without first creating a team.”<sup>28</sup> The lessons learned while attending Fort Leavenworth would remain with Eisenhower for the rest of his life and be put into practice frequently with the different command positions he would go on to hold.

Eisenhower went on to hold a variety of different assignments. He published a guidebook to American battlefields, attended and graduated from the Army War College in 1928, and then headed to France with Mamie to expand and revise his initial guidebook with the Battle Monuments Commission under the direction of General John J. Pershing.<sup>29</sup> In 1933, after serving in the office of the assistant Secretary of War for a time, Eisenhower was appointed as aide to General Douglas MacArthur, the Army’s Chief of Staff.<sup>30</sup> He stayed with MacArthur for a total of seven years, continuing as his assistant even when MacArthur’s tenure as the Army’s Chief of Staff changed in 1935 to a position as the military advisor to the Philippines. This meant relocation to Manila, but the Eisenhower family adjusted well to living abroad again. Eisenhower’s placement with MacArthur was not always easy, for they both possessed strong personalities that would invariably clash with each other, but Eisenhower still valued those seven years of experience.

In 1939, as World War II began gathering steam in Europe, Eisenhower realized that the great war General Connor had predicted years ago in Panama was on his doorstep. He applied for “immediate reassignment in the United States,” determined to be actively

---

<sup>23</sup> Miller, *Ike the Soldier*, 212.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>25</sup> Galambos, *Eisenhower*, 49.

<sup>26</sup> Chester J. Pach, Jr., “Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life Before the Presidency,” Miller Center, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/life-before-the-presidency>.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, *Ike the Soldier*, 230.

<sup>28</sup> Perret, *Eisenhower*, 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Lyon, *Eisenhower*, 72.

involved in the conflict.<sup>31</sup> He and his family returned to the U.S., and he served in a variety of positions involved with the planning and training of different troops. Eisenhower was sought after by almost every general in the Army – they all wanted him on their staff, for he was renowned for his intelligence and talent in planning. The man who finally procured him for himself was Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, who desired Eisenhower to be the chief of staff for the Third Army. Krueger communicated with General George C. Marshall, and persuaded his comrade to give him Ike in July of 1941.<sup>32</sup> Eisenhower did well for himself with the Third Army, earning a promotion to brigadier general.

Then came December of 1941. The attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, and Eisenhower's life changed forever. Dwight David Eisenhower was called to Washington by General George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, to consult on war plans as a planning officer.<sup>33</sup> In the words of historian Peter Lyon, this is the moment "Brigadier General Eisenhower's foot [passed over] the threshold of fame."<sup>34</sup> Eisenhower so impressed his high-ranking superiors with his performance in this assignment that he quickly began receiving important command assignments. He commanded the Allied Troops that invaded North Africa and then directed subsequent invasions of Sicily and Italy. The culmination of this earned respect was the assignment of the position of Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, as well as the command of the troops invading France on D-Day in Operation Overlord. His performance in World War II catapulted him in the span of a few years from an "obscure lieutenant colonel to a four-star general in charge of one of the greatest military forces in history."<sup>35</sup>

At the end of 1945, after the war ended, Eisenhower returned home to serve as Chief of Staff of the Army. He was a "hero, loved and admired by the American public."<sup>36</sup>

## Political Career

After returning from WWII and serving as the Army's Chief of Staff for approximately three years, Eisenhower was approached by two trustees of Columbia University, with an important offer.<sup>37</sup> Columbia had been searching for a president for two years, and due to financial and administrative difficulties, they needed someone who would be able to take charge and restore Columbia's reputation. In their eyes, Eisenhower was the man for the job – his reputation and organizational leadership skillset preceded him. Ike accepted the position and served as president of the institution from 1948 to his resignation in January of 1953. These were formative years for Eisenhower – it was his first civilian job, it

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>33</sup> Pach, Jr., "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life Before the Presidency."

<sup>34</sup> Lyon, *Eisenhower*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Pach, Jr., "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life Before the Presidency."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Travis B. Jacobs, "Dwight D. Eisenhower's Presidency of Columbia University," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1985): 556, accessed March 20, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/27550244](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550244).

provided him with the opportunity to invest in the younger generation's education, and it gave him time to form his own philosophical, political, and social views.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, Eisenhower served as a rather distant president for most of his tenure at Columbia. He took leave in December of 1950 to "assume supreme command over the new NATO forces being assembled."<sup>39</sup> While serving in his role at NATO, he tried to maintain political neutrality, but faced growing pressures from both Democrats and Republicans to run for President (for their respective parties) in the 1952 election. Despite his initial reluctance, the influence and pressure of "several Republican emissaries to his headquarters near Paris persuaded him to run," along with the grassroots "Draft Eisenhower" movement that sprang up within the Republican party.<sup>40</sup>

Eisenhower announced that he was a Republican, and "returned home to seek the nomination personally."<sup>41</sup> He now perceived his entrance into the race as a "matter of duty."<sup>42</sup> Eisenhower "was not ready to retire or abandon his country to others... he wanted what was best for his country, and in the end he decided that he was the best and would have to serve."<sup>43</sup> He won the nomination handily at the RNC and continued on to pursue national victory against Democratic opponent Adlai A. Stevenson. Eisenhower ran on the campaign slogan "I Like Ike," "endeared himself to the American people with his plain talk, charming smile, and sense of confidence," and won a sweeping victory against Stevenson.<sup>44</sup>

His first term was mostly uneventful. It was, as mentioned before, a peaceful time for America. Eisenhower signed an armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953. The economic growth America experienced during this peaceable time also helped his record. His approval ratings ranged between 68% and 79% in 1955.<sup>45</sup> When it came time to run for reelection, despite health problems that had cropped up in the preceding year, Ike announced he would be running again. His platform focused on his political track record, as well as some of the personable qualities that put him in office in the first place. With little real competition, the reelection campaign for Eisenhower resulted in an even broader victory than before.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 559.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, "Dwight D. Eisenhower," The White House, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/dwight-d-eisenhower/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 47.

<sup>42</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 1*, 527.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 528.

<sup>44</sup> Pach, Jr., "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life in Brief."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## Perceptions of Eisenhower: Then and Now

As mentioned in the introduction, the critique of Eisenhower while he was in office that had characterized public perception of him for a time afterward was that he was a “Do-Nothing” President. According to Fred Greenstein, author of *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, Eisenhower was viewed as an “aging hero who reigned more than he ruled and lacked the energy, motivation, and political know-how to have a significant impact on events.”<sup>46</sup> Richard Rovere, a political journalist for the *New Yorker* during the 1950s, was a vocal critic of Eisenhower, casting him as a typical American with a bland personality and dull mind that lacked interest in “the whole operating side of government.”<sup>47</sup> People mistook the still waters of his time as an indication that nothing was really happening and became frustrated with him for appearing to be an unengaged leader. Critics utilized the lack of observable action coming from the White House to perpetuate the characterization of Eisenhower as lazy and politically inept.

It appeared to many outside the administration that Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was the one running the country. It was often assumed that the President left the governing of the country to his White House assistants, while he went off to golf or fish. Eisenhower’s public persona did not help combat this assumption – when asked questions on issues, his “meandering, garbled answers to questions at press conferences” made people wonder whether “he grasped issues and had clear ideas about how to deal with them” at all.<sup>48</sup>

Even though the label of “do-nothing” was often meant in a negative manner, however, it could be viewed as praise of a kind. In many ways, the “do-nothing” could stand for how he didn’t continue the Korean War. Eisenhower refrained from embroiling the United States in any international conflict, despite tensions running high due to the Cold War atmosphere.<sup>49</sup> His policies also produced a very stable, middle-of-the-road domestic sphere during his years in office. So in some ways, the critique could be turned into a positive aspect of his presidency.

This popular critique, with both its negative and positive connotations, would eventually be reversed. Eisenhower’s presidency, as mentioned, has undergone significant work in historical revisionism due to the release of his personal and administrative papers, and a subsequent changing of popular perception of him as a less-than-spectacular president to being revealed as an involved and effective leader.

Three key historians who contributed significantly to this effort by publishing seminal works on the subject are Robert Divine, Stephen Ambrose, and Fred Greenstein. Divine’s historical work, *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, was published in 1981, and was the first to

---

<sup>46</sup> Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Richard H. Rovere, *Affairs of State: The Eisenhower Years* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), 353.

<sup>48</sup> Pach, Jr., “Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life in Brief.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

notably take on “the remarkably persistent legend that Eisenhower was a do-nothing president.”<sup>50</sup> Divine’s book is short, but he effectively argues within its pages that Ike was an adept political leader. For Divine, the “model of presidential restraint” that Eisenhower left America with is something oft overlooked and undervalued, especially when considered within the context of the Cold War.<sup>51</sup>

The following year, Fred I. Greenstein published *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*. Greenstein’s rebuttal of the negative perception of Eisenhower as president is perhaps the most well-known, for he is the one who aptly coined the phrase “hidden-hand presidency” to describe Eisenhower and his two terms in office. His thesis presents the idea of Eisenhower acting with a hidden-hand throughout his time in the Oval Office – one that controlled and delegated quite a bit more than was thought and made him into a “far more effective leader than many critics realized.”<sup>52</sup> Greenstein does not claim that this made Eisenhower a perfect president or political genius, but he does highlight the value of this leadership style for that specific time period.

Finally, last in the line of historians who defined the field of Eisenhower revisionism comes Stephen E. Ambrose. Ambrose published the two-volume work *Eisenhower: Soldier & President* in 1984. Within the pages of the two books, Ambrose records the life of Dwight David Eisenhower. The presidential years are analyzed in the second volume, and Ambrose presents a strong argument that Eisenhower “ran the show” as President.<sup>53</sup>

The monumental impetus behind this changing of historical perspective was the release of the Eisenhower administration’s papers in the 1970s and 1980s. With the influx of new evidence and source material, historians suddenly had much more to consider aside from just public opinion, partisan news reports, popular critique, and the appearance of stability that the administration put forth.<sup>54</sup> The new evidentiary findings began to support more and more the idea of Eisenhower as a deft and able leader, one who was a strong politician and a powerful president.

## Proofs for the Change

One of the most important aspects of historical research is the ability of the historian to locate and access primary sources and documents that display the truth of the subject being researched. As much as secondary sources can help in providing background knowledge, a historian cannot (or should not) speak with authority on a subject until he or she has appropriately studied the primary sources that help construct the proper and truthful narrative. Such is the case with Dwight David Eisenhower and the examination of him as a political leader. Fortunately, primary sources abound on the subject. Eisenhower

---

<sup>50</sup> C. J. Bartlett, “Eisenhower and the Cold War (Book Review),” *History* 67, no. 221 (1982): 444, accessed March 20, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/24418225](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24418225).

<sup>51</sup> Robert Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 155.

<sup>52</sup> Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 248.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 2 – The President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 10.

<sup>54</sup> De Santis, “Eisenhower Revisionism,” 203.

himself was a prolific author, writing several autobiographies, memoirs, and of course, his personal diaries. In addition to his first-person works, historians can consult the memoirs of various family members and close colleagues who have also written on their time and experiences with Ike. Lastly, there are the countless papers of his administration, which contain notes, letters, memorandums, official documents, speech transcripts, and much more. Historians wishing to acquaint themselves with Dwight David Eisenhower are not lacking in source material with which to do so.

The largest and most notable resource an aspiring Eisenhower scholar should first review are *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*. It is a 21-volume set of books in which dedicated historians chronologically collated “the most significant letters, memoranda, cables, and directives written or dictated by Eisenhower from the years prior to World War II through the full term of his presidency.”<sup>55</sup> This set consists of well over 14,000 pages, and includes many documents which were previously classified but have since been released for public perusal. It is an impressive work and a historian’s dream come true in terms of source material.

Volumes XIV-XXI cover Eisenhower’s presidency, and the documents within portray Eisenhower as very practically involved and invested in his leadership of the nation. The editors kindly provide notations and introductions before each document, so as to orient the reader to the reason it was written, the person to whom it was directed, and the context behind it. The volumes detail his correspondence and interaction with the heads of other countries, such as King ibn Abd al-Aziz Saud of Saudi Arabia and David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, his directives to colleagues such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams, and the notes he wrote pertaining to personal affairs, such as checking up on Mamie while abroad.<sup>56</sup> The editors of these volumes make an effort to only include the documents authored by Eisenhower himself and not every slip of paper that ever proceeded from the Oval Office with his signature on it.

As could be rightfully assumed, among the thousands and thousands of pages of the *Papers* exist thousands and thousands of excerpts demonstrating how involved Eisenhower was. From his direction to John Foster Dulles to delete a specific sentence in one of Dulles’ letters, to cabling British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan to request an immediate meeting to “hear first-hand your impressions from your trip to the Soviet Union and to discuss what we must do on important issues in the coming months,” Eisenhower

---

<sup>55</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, edited by Louis Galambos, 21 vols (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970-2001).

<sup>56</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency – Keeping the Peace, Volume XVIII*, ed. Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

demonstrates an adept understanding and effective managing of his colleagues in order to achieve the ends he desired as President.<sup>57</sup>

The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower is not the only work to undertake the publishing and dissemination of the documents and files of President Eisenhower, however. Another notable primary resource is the two-volume publication *The Eisenhower Administration 1953-1961: A Documentary History*, which dives into the political philosophy and leadership style of Eisenhower as President. Robert Branyan and Lawrence Larson, the editors, work to collate major documents from Eisenhower's administration to "shed new light on the Eisenhower Presidency."<sup>58</sup> While their collection does not highlight the personal engagement of Eisenhower in the many aspects of government as the Papers do, the two volumes manage to present a clear picture of where the Eisenhower administration stood on key issues during his two terms.

However, this is not to say that the collection solely consists of formal government documents. Interspersed among the official speeches, proposals, budgets, and various governmental files are occasional personal communications from President Eisenhower. One such letter, shown to be from Eisenhower to the Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, details Eisenhower's desire for Benson to present a specific message to delegates to the Food for Peace conference on May 4, 1959. In his letter, Eisenhower goes into so much detail that he drafts not only the substance of the speech, but also the greeting he wishes Benson to begin with, as well as a conclusion that includes his "appreciation and best wishes."<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the massive number of official collections of important papers, there are also the primary sources written and published by Eisenhower himself. These include his memoirs of the White House years, as well as his diaries and letters. One fascinating collection of Ike's personal correspondence is Robert Griffith's edited work titled *Ike's Letters to a Friend 1941-1958*. The book is a compilation of the letters exchanged between two lifelong friends – Eisenhower and his childhood buddy Swede Hazlett.<sup>60</sup> After growing up together, the two men maintained their friendship via mail, for they did not frequently see each other. Griffith collected the more than 150 letters exchanged between Ike and Swede in a slim volume that charmingly displays the honesty, encouragement, and banter that comes out of a lifelong friendship.

While this source proves to be just as entertaining as it is informative, it too contributes meaningfully to the character of Eisenhower as President. As much as Ike's letters are full of personal inquiries, inside jokes, and advice about how to catch the best fish, he also

---

<sup>57</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency – Keeping the Peace, Volume XX*, ed. Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1399.

<sup>58</sup> Robert L. Branyan and Lawrence H. Larson, *The Eisenhower Administration 1953-1961: A Documentary History, Volume 1* (New York: Random House, 1971), viii.

<sup>59</sup> Robert L. Branyan and Lawrence H. Larson, *The Eisenhower Administration 1953-1961: A Documentary History, Volume 2* (New York: Random House, 1971), 884.

<sup>60</sup> Griffith, *Ike's Letters to a Friend*, 1.

includes his honest thoughts about his desire to lead well out of concern and love for his country. One such letter, written on October 23, 1954, confesses to Swede his angst over those who would accuse him of allowing John Foster Dulles to run foreign affairs. He writes, “so far as Dulles is concerned, he has never made a serious pronouncement, agreement, or proposal without complete and exhaustive consultation with me in advance and, of course, my approval.”<sup>61</sup> He often answers public critiques directed towards him in the private correspondence between Swede and himself, defending his decisions and course of action to his dear friend. This source reveals a more vulnerable side of Eisenhower than seen in either the Papers or The Eisenhower Administration.

Another source that shows a more honest Eisenhower is *The Eisenhower Diaries*. Compiled and edited by Robert Ferrell, the diaries “reveal the innermost thoughts of the soldier-statesman,” and put on display “a man who carefully masked his shrewdness, his purposes.”<sup>62</sup> Diaries are unique sources of information, for they often reveal who the author really is - there is no reason for pretense or falsehood with oneself. Eisenhower’s diaries are no different; here, Ike had significantly less of a censor. One diary entry from January 10, 1955 serves as an example of this in how it recounts his frustration with a certain Senator from California, of whom Eisenhower wrote, “In his case, there seems to be no final answer to the question ‘How stupid can you get?’”<sup>63</sup>

Within his diaries, Eisenhower discussed everything from interesting new facts to his opinions of various characters around him. He would often use the blank pages as a kind of private therapy session, processing whatever dilemma he needed to think through without worrying about a loose tongue breaching confidentiality. Though the diaries contained in this volume cover far more than just the presidency, the excerpts included from that time reinforce the supposition that Eisenhower was the real power behind the scenes. He writes of long talks with ambassadors, senators, aides, and assistants.

One of the most frequently mentioned political associates in these entries is John Foster Dulles, his Secretary of State. Eisenhower often wrote of conversations with Dulles where they reasoned through potential foreign problems and the solutions they desired or resolved conflict in their respective points of view. One such entry, dated January 10, 1956, records that “the secretary and I discussed the whole story of our foreign operations since 1953... we have tried to keep constantly before us the purpose of promoting peace with accompanying step-by-step disarmament.”<sup>64</sup> Such discussions oriented around clarifying perspectives and goals appear to be a habit Eisenhower often carried out with his subordinates. His diaries record many a similar meeting with different people.

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>62</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), xi.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 305.

The last first-person primary source to be evaluated when examining Eisenhower as President are his memoirs of the White House years. There are two volumes, split between his two terms. They essentially contain the story of his administration as told by the 34th President himself and are a valuable resource for any historian or scholar wishing to learn more about the Eisenhower era. Eisenhower relates what his life was like from the time he announced his candidacy to the moment John F. Kennedy was inaugurated. His account is helpful, though undeniably personally biased, but the most striking section is found at the end of the second volume. It is titled "Afterthoughts," and it is composed of Eisenhower's thoughts after finishing the "factual recital of [his] eight years in the Presidency." <sup>65</sup>

He reflects on the lessons he learned, the situations he would have handled differently in hindsight, the decisions he made that he was proud of, and of how the political context was changing and would continue to change. His ending thought, however, was of the pride and gratefulness he had for "the privilege of having had a role in the revolutionary changes that have come about during these last two decades... to the benefit of mankind." <sup>66</sup> Throughout his account, he emphasizes how glad he was to have the chance to serve his country. While his accounting of his actions and administration may not be perfectly neutral, the desire he has for his country's best is genuinely proven over and over again. It speaks in an honest way of his values as President and rebuts the critique that he was an unengaged and lackadaisical leader.

Aside from the primary sources that were authored by Eisenhower himself, historians can look to the testimonies of his military colleagues and political subordinates to verify the kind of leader he was. One of the most fascinating personal accounts about what it was like to serve under Eisenhower in the military was published by Captain Harry C. Butcher, a naval aide to General Eisenhower from 1942 to 1945. *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, the publication of Butcher's personal diary, recounts "daily entries about the war lives of [Ike and Harry] both." <sup>67</sup> The diary goes into great detail about the day-to-day happenings in the last three years of the war, portraying Eisenhower to be a caring and responsive leader. Butcher never holds him in anything other than the highest position of respect; even the introduction serves to project how fondly Butcher looks back on his time of service under "General Ike." <sup>68</sup>

In terms of testimonies from those who worked with Eisenhower while he was President, two essential figures that need to be considered are John Foster Dulles and Sherman Adams. Both served the President in essential roles and are compelling witnesses to his actions. Dulles and Adams both held a great deal of responsibility within the Eisenhower administration, and both were sometimes pointed to by critics as the real movers and

---

<sup>65</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 621.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 658.

<sup>67</sup> Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower: The Personal Diary of Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, Naval Aide to General Eisenhower, 1942 to 1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), xi.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 800.

shakers of the White House during this time, as compared to the President who was perceived to be quite uninvolved.

Sherman Adams, the White House Chief of Staff for Eisenhower, published a memoir of his time serving the President in 1961 titled *First-Hand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration*. Adams was, for his six-year tenure as Chief of Staff, one of the most powerful men in Washington. He was the person through whom all of Eisenhower's paperwork, personal meetings, and preliminary information was funneled. In his words, he got to work side-by-side with and see "a great military leader, under intense pressures, in sickness as well as in health, applying himself to the responsibilities of the presidency."<sup>69</sup> Adams was the character who, in Eisenhower's administration, could engage in pitched political conflict on behalf of the President, but at the same time enable Eisenhower "to remain aloof from the fisticuffs of the battling parties."<sup>70</sup> He was a valuable political colleague and friend to Eisenhower; Adam's *First-Hand Report* shows the feelings to be mutual. He writes that he learned much from Eisenhower as leader and found much to admire within the man. Adams spoke often with Eisenhower about the responsibilities and demands of the Presidential office and how "the President must have authority to delegate more work and responsibilities to others," so as to free him to devote his attention to the bigger and more pressing matters.<sup>71</sup> This, Adams writes, was a hallmark of Eisenhower's style, and one of the reasons he was criticized harshly. Adams, as one of Ike's most trusted men, was a person to whom much was delegated, but he also attested that simply because the President delegated it to him did not mean the President no longer cared. It was just a matter of prioritization.

John Foster Dulles, like Sherman Adams, was an essential figure in Eisenhower's administration. As Secretary of State for Eisenhower, he took his duties with utmost seriousness, and worked his hardest to do his job well. Alongside Sherman Adams, Dulles quickly became one of the most powerful and prominent men in Washington in the 1950s. He was often cited as the man who ran the United States' foreign affairs during this time; however, what critics did not know was that while John Foster Dulles was the face of foreign affairs, Eisenhower and Dulles collaborated on nearly everything. The two men had what Fred Greenstein termed a "collegial working relationship."<sup>72</sup> They stayed in touch almost daily.<sup>73</sup> While it may seem on the face that Dulles was the "senior colleague," Eisenhower was the one who made the final decisions policy-wise, "and Dulles executed them."<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Sherman Adams, *First-Hand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 295.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 460.

<sup>72</sup> Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 151.

<sup>74</sup> Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 87.

Something of import to note, in the cases of both Adams and Dulles, is how while both men would unhesitatingly attest to the strong and savvy leader Eisenhower was, Eisenhower's leadership style often highlighted those very qualities in those two men for the public eye. Greenstein notes that Eisenhower's "strategies involved making the chief of state aspect of the president's job evident, while veiling much of his political leadership."<sup>75</sup> His style was one of delegation and neutrality; while this benefitted and built up the men he chose to be on his team in the political arena, it did not help him with regard to public perception.

Considering who Eisenhower was, however, this does not come as a surprise. Having matured in the ranks of the Army, serving under Generals like Connor, MacArthur, and Marshall, and overseeing a grand scheme like Operation Overlord in World War II, Eisenhower was not a man prone to seeking public favor above all else. He was a military man at heart, and when put in a political context, he still saw the practicality of military organization and delegation and thus organized his administration to mimic that. Eisenhower's "staff formulations were designed to maximize responsibility in each department... he surrounded himself with bold and forceful talents he admired and sought vigorous participation and debate at cabinet or staff meetings."<sup>76</sup> This kind of organization at the White House had not been seen before, but it would be a lasting legacy of the Eisenhower administration.

Along with the abundance of primary source material that proves the deft, savvy, and invested leader Eisenhower was in his role as President, historians can look to the legacy that he left behind him when he left office. His domestic and international record is substantial. While it may have appeared that little happened during his two terms, Eisenhower actually dealt with a number of tricky international and domestic situations. His handling of said situations was not always infallible, but for the most part, he dealt with the pressures and problems well.

Internationally, Ike first tackled Korea. He oversaw the signing of an armistice that ended the Korean War in July of 1953. After Korea, he and his administration turned their attention to fighting communism throughout the world. He also had to deal with the Suez Crisis and the U.S. relationship with Egyptian President Nasser in the mid-1950s, involving the U.S. with the fate of the Middle East for the foreseeable future.

A significant component of foreign affairs during Eisenhower's presidency was the U.S.-Russian relationship and the delicate manner in which Eisenhower and Dulles had to contrive to handle the temperamental Cold War tensions that were ever-present in this time. Eisenhower's administration walked a fine line between the mutual desire to combat communism and not provoking the Russian bear, but that attempt was somewhat ruined by the U-2 spy plane that was shot down over Russia in 1960. The incident was an embarrassment to the United States and put a serious damper on the promising

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>76</sup> Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower*, 150.

relationship that had begun to form with Khrushchev. It was an unfortunate event on which to end Eisenhower's term.

Domestically, during his presidential years, Eisenhower oversaw some rather turbulent crises within the U.S. borders. It was around this time that the Civil Rights movement began to gain momentum, and Eisenhower's support played a significant role in the advances made in the 1950s. There were several steps he took to expand this effort, including finishing the racial desegregation of the armed forces that Truman began and introducing the first significant civil rights legislation since the late 1800s with the signing of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960. Eisenhower is also the president under whom the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was decided, and he was the one to act decisively by deploying the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock High School in Arkansas to enforce the desegregation of the public school there.

In many ways, the Little Rock High School situation serves as a case study in demonstrating Eisenhower's political acumen. In terms of the broad Civil Rights movement, Eisenhower felt it was "not his job to crusade [fervently] for integration, [yet] he also felt that he should do a conscientious job of promoting integration within areas where the President had special legal responsibility."<sup>77</sup> Thus, he desegregated the armed forces, Veterans Administration Hospitals, military schools, naval bases, and the D.C. government. He held firmly to the position that federal decisions, such as the Supreme Court's holding in *Brown v. Board of Education*, must be executed, but he also understood the dilemma of changing the long-seated racism and centuries-old mentality of the South. Eisenhower realized that "you cannot change people's hearts merely by laws," but he also knew that legal implementation of integration would be necessary on some level.<sup>78</sup>

At the time that the situation at Little Rock High School was starting to develop, Eisenhower left for a scheduled vacation in New England. By the time his plane touched down in Newport on September 4, 1957, the "events in Little Rock had become a national crisis."<sup>79</sup> What transpired over the span of the next twenty days would prove to be one of the worst domestic challenges the Eisenhower administration would have to deal with.

The main problem centered on the actions of Orval Faubus, Arkansas' governor. Faubus had chosen to oppose a federal court decision that ordered Little Rock to move forward with the desegregation of the schools, and did so with force, deploying the Arkansas National Guard to the high school. To summarize the situation, "a state governor, backed by an armed militia, now stood in defiance of a federal court order."<sup>80</sup> Eisenhower now had to find a way to try to avoid direct confrontation with Faubus, but also enforce the power of the federal government.

---

<sup>77</sup> Arthur Larson, *Eisenhower: The President Nobody Knew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 128.

<sup>78</sup> William I. Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower: American and the World in the 1950s* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 361.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 363.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 362.

Eisenhower, after consulting with both Sherman Adams and Attorney General Herbert Brownell, tried to rein in Faubus discreetly. He corresponded with him several times and eventually met with the governor in person, hoping to convince Faubus of the need for avoiding a showdown between the President and a governor. Unfortunately, the subtly worded telegrams and personal meeting were ineffective, and Faubus continued with his course, directly defying the President's wish for him to back down. On September 20, a federal district court issued an injunction against Faubus, ordering he "halt his obstructionism."<sup>81</sup>

Faubus complied by removing the Arkansas National Guard but proceeded to incite the angry gathering to action via a "fervent prayer that the mob would not come out to the school... and instigate any trouble."<sup>82</sup> Of course, the mob followed Faubus' sly suggestion, causing violent chaos when the black students came to school Monday morning. At this point, Eisenhower still hoped that he would not have to deploy troops to the school, but issued a stern warning that "federal law cannot be flouted with impunity by any individual or mob of extremists," making it clear that he would use force if necessary.<sup>83</sup>

The next day, September 24, 1957, marks "one of the most significant dates" of Eisenhower's presidency. The mob payed no heed to Eisenhower's warning, causing even more disorder than on the previous day. Eisenhower determined it was time to enforce his words with action. It is at this moment that Eisenhower "lived up to his oath of office."<sup>84</sup> He had taken an oath to uphold the law, no matter the circumstances, and that is exactly what he was doing. He was not pleased it had come to this point, but he understood the necessity of his next action. Eisenhower told Brownell that if he had to use force, he was going to "use overwhelming force," and he instructed the Army's Chief of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, to deploy units of the 101st Airborne to Little Rock.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, he issued an executive order that effectively federalized the Arkansas National Guard and commanded them to join the 101st. Over 1,000 troops arrived by 7:00 pm that evening, deploying around the circumference of the high school.

This was a hard moment for Eisenhower. It "pained him greatly" that Southerners perceived his actions to be undertaken in extreme opposition to the South, and he was upset that Faubus had placed him in this position. Yet he understood that it was necessary. He had tried a multitude of other paths, hoping that he wouldn't have to use the force his authority as President granted him, but also staunchly holding that he would if needed. In the aftermath of the events of September 24th, he addressed the nation, expressing his sadness over the situation at hand. He purposely did not address the merits of the crisis of Little Rock, but instead spoke about his duty to fulfill "his oath to defend the Constitution."

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 367.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 369.

<sup>84</sup> Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume 2*, 421.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 369.

<sup>86</sup> Eisenhower understood that in this moment, the President did not need to be painted as a “champion of civil rights but as a defender of law and order.” <sup>87</sup>

He faced significant backlash from Southern politicians and reporters due to his actions, but also received significant praise from black leaders and civil rights supporters around the country. It was not an easy time for him, both personally and politically, for he struggled with the decision to deploy troops domestically, but he knew there was no other recourse. The situation at Little Rock High School gradually calmed, and as days passed, the events that took place there began to fade into memory. There would be many more crisis and ruptures of the peace as the Civil Rights movement continued, but Eisenhower’s presidency had weathered its largest crisis in that area.

In addition to the controversies produced by the Civil Rights movement, Eisenhower had to actively deal with the situation being caused by Senator Joe McCarthy’s fearmongering. Eisenhower had a great distaste for McCarthy and all of his doings, but he could not publicly denounce the man. Rather, the President determined to ignore him. He fully believed that “nothing w[ould] be so effective in combating this particular kind of trouble-making as to ignore him... this he cannot stand.” <sup>88</sup> However, when Eisenhower’s tactics failed because of the grandiose scale on which McCarthy conducted himself, the administration was forced to act against him. Yet Eisenhower hesitated to attack him, for he did not see much benefit coming from that route of action. Instead, he and his administration actively worked to politically undermine McCarthy, which would eventually end with the Senate censuring McCarthy and effectively ending his influence.

The last major domestic legacy that Eisenhower left the United States with was the Interstate Highway System. This is often viewed as one of Eisenhower’s greatest contributions to his country, for it is impossible to conceive of the modern continental United States without the interstate highway system. While not an issue that he had to address, or a political figure that he needed to combat, it was a valuable service that Eisenhower provided to his country when he signed the bill that authorized the highway system in 1956. The system was meant for more than just personal interstate travel – there is a strategic military design behind it that fortunately has not yet been needed, but which undoubtedly contributed to Eisenhower’s interest in the venture, alongside a personal interest in cross-country travel. This, along with the many other accomplishments he and his administration achieved both domestically and internationally, contribute to a legacy that promotes a view of Eisenhower as a careful and forward-thinking leader of one of the most powerful countries in the world.

---

<sup>86</sup> Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower*, 370.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 169.

## Conclusion

The evidence speaks for itself on the subject of whom and what Eisenhower was like as President of the United States. On the other end of history, after all the papers and documents have been released, after the dust has settled in the Middle East and relations with Russia have calmed down, after the Civil Rights movement changed the nation, and after all the memoirs have been published and final words spoken, the answer seems obvious. Dwight David Eisenhower was an unusual President... but he was a good one. He was not perfect. He made mistakes, and there were moments and decisions that even he admits he would have changed. But he certainly was not who he had been contemporaneously portrayed to be.

He was not lazy. He did not golf and goof his way through his two terms of service as President. He was not controlled by strong personalities like Sherman Adams or John Foster Dulles. He was a deft politician, one who was able to delegate and run his administration effectively behind the scenes. He was savvy in his choice of subordinates and smart in his decisions on which course of action to take. His military experiences prepared and served him well for the role he assumed as President of the United States; while he was not the conventional politician by any means, he was not any less effective because of that difference.

His reputation as a “do-nothing” President has successfully undergone a change within the past few decades that has led to a more correct perception of Eisenhower and his administration. In some ways, his reputation now more resembles that of a “did-everything” President – the evidence certainly does not contradict the label. Eisenhower and his presidency is a fascinating case of revisionism working its way through history in a positive manner, and there is much to learn from the work that has been done and is still being done on the subject. To undertake the task of fully proving just how deft of a politician and shrewd of a president Eisenhower was would have to be the goal of a lifetime of scholarly work on the subject, a route many historians have chosen, fortunately. Through their work and efforts, the truth has been revealed and the historical record set straight. As Eisenhower once said, “the world moves, and ideas that were good once are not always good.”<sup>89</sup> This applies aptly to history, for as is seen in the case of Eisenhower himself, accepted perceptions or conclusions are not always correct. To correct them is the duty of a historian, and it is satisfying work when it is done.

---

<sup>89</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Quotes,” Eisenhower Presidential Library, last modified November 5, 2019, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/eisenhowers/quotes>.

---

## Bibliography

- Adams, Sherman. *First-Hand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. *Eisenhower: Volume 1 - Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. *Eisenhower: Volume 2 – The President*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984.
- Bartlett, C. J. "Eisenhower and the Cold War (Book Review)." *History* 67, no. 221 (1982): 444. Accessed March 20, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/24418225](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24418225).
- Branyan, Robert L., and Lawrence H. Larson. *The Eisenhower Administration 1953-1961: A Documentary History, Volume 1*. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Branyan, Robert L., and Lawrence H. Larson. *The Eisenhower Administration 1953-1961: A Documentary History, Volume 2*. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Butcher, Harry C. *My Three Years with Eisenhower: The Personal Diary of Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, Naval Aide to General Eisenhower, 1942 to 1945*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946.
- Cook, Blanche Wiesen. *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare*. New York: Doubleday, 1981.
- De Santis, Vincent P. "Eisenhower Revisionism." *The Review of Politics* 38, no. 2 (1976): 190-207. Accessed March 20, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/1405936](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1405936).
- Divine, Robert. *Eisenhower and the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The Eisenhower Diaries*. Edited by Robert H. Ferrell. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*. Edited by Louis Galambos. 21 vols. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970-2001.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency – Keeping the Peace, Volume XVIII*. Edited by Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The Presidency – Keeping the Peace, Volume XX*. Edited by Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001.

- Eisenhower, Dwight D. "Quotes." Eisenhower Presidential Library. Last modified November 5, 2019. Accessed April 6, 2020. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/eisenhowers/quotes>.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*. New York, Doubleday, 1963.
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961*. New York: Doubleday, 1965.
- Freidel, Frank, and Hugh Sidey. "Dwight D. Eisenhower." The White House. Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/dwight-d-eisenhower/>.
- Galambos, Louis. *Eisenhower: Becoming the Leader of the Free World*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018.
- Greenstein, Fred I. *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982.
- Greenstein, Fred I. *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Griffith, Robert, ed. *Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941-1958*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1984.
- Hitchcock, William I. *The Age of Eisenhower: American and the World in the 1950s*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018.
- Jacobs, Travis B. "Dwight D. Eisenhower's Presidency of Columbia University." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1985): 555-560. Accessed March 20, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/27550244](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550244).
- Larson, Arthur. *Eisenhower: The President Nobody Knew*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968.
- Lyon, Peter. *Eisenhower: Portrait of a Hero*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974.
- Miller, Merle. *Ike the Soldier: As They Knew Him*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1987.
- Pach, Jr., Chester J. "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life Before the Presidency." Miller Center. Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/life-before-the-presidency>.
- Pach, Jr., Chester J. "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Life in Brief." Miller Center. Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/life-in-brief>.
- Perret, Geoffrey. *Eisenhower*. New York: Random House, 1999.

Polsky, Andrew J., ed. *The Eisenhower Presidency: Lessons for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015.

Rabe, Stephen G. "Eisenhower Revisionism: A Decade of Scholarship." *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 1 (1993): 97-115. Accessed March 20, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/24912261](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24912261).

Rovere, Richard H. *Affairs of State: The Eisenhower Years*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956.

## Sources Consulted

Baier, Brett. *Three Days in January: Dwight Eisenhower's Final Mission*. New York: Harper Collins, 2017.

Beal, John Robinson. *John Foster Dulles: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957.

Burk, Robert F. *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Hero and Politician*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986.

Donovan, Robert J. *Eisenhower: The Inside Story*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.

Eisenhower, David, and Julie Nixon Eisenhower. *Going Home to Glory: A Memoir of Life with Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961-1969*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

Hill, Clint, and Lisa McCubbin. *Five Presidents: My Extraordinary Journey with Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford*. New York: Gallery Books, 2016.

Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: The Free Press, 1990.

Newton, Jim. *Eisenhower: The White House Years*. New York: Doubleday, 2011.

Pach, Jr., Chester J., and Elmo Richardson. *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Revised Edition*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991.

Pinkley, Virgil, and James F. Scheer. *Eisenhower Declassified*. New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1979.

Pruessen, Ronald W. *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power*. New York: The Free Press, 1982.

Thompson, Kenneth W., ed. *The Eisenhower Presidency: Eleven Intimate Perspectives of Dwight D. Eisenhower*. New York: University Press of America, 1984.

Warshaw, Shirley Anne, ed. *Reexamining the Eisenhower Presidency*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993.