

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Armando F. Sanchez Productions collection

Special Collections & University Archives

10-2021

"The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow" featuring guest Dr. Michael J. Devine

Armando F. Sanchez Productions

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/armando-sanchez-papers>

Recommended Citation

Armando F. Sanchez Productions, ""The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow" featuring guest Dr. Michael J. Devine" (2021). *Armando F. Sanchez Productions collection*. 4.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/armando-sanchez-papers/4>

This Video is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections & University Archives at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Armando F. Sanchez Productions collection by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Armando F Sanchez Production

The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow

Guest: Dr. Michael J. Devine

Interviewer: Armando F Sanchez

October 26, 2021

Copyright © 2022 by Armando F Sanchez

Dr. Michael J. Devine

Video Production: <https://youtu.be/ToJJNZMhHT8>

Dr. Michael J. Devine served as the Director the Harry S. Truman Library from 2001-2014. During his 40 year career in the administration of public history institutions, he held positions as Director of the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, Illinois State Historian and Director of the Illinois State Historical Society, and Assistant Director of the Ohio Historical Society.

He received his Ph.D. in U.S. Diplomatic History from Ohio State University in 1974.

He has served as a Senior Fulbright Lecturer to Argentina (1983) and Korea (1995), and was the Haughton Freeman Professor of American History at the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing University Graduate Center in Nanjing, China (1998-1999).

In 2014 he was awarded the Robert Kelley Memorial Prize from the National Council on Public History for life-time achievement.

Armando F Sanchez: On our program today we have Dr. Michael J. Devine. He's a guest on our "Cold War series Living Under Its Shadow" series.

Dr. Devine received his Ph.D. in US Diplomatic History. I didn't even know there was such a thing but he did it at Ohio State University in 1974. I guess you were watching the football teams when you were there.

Dr. Michael J. Devine: Not only that but I made a little extra money tutoring football players.

Sanchez: Dr. Devine served as a director of the Harry S. Truman Library from 2001 to 2014. During his 40-year career in the administration of public history institutions, he held positions as director of the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming Illinois State, historian, and director of the Illinois State Historical Society, and assistant director of the Ohio Historical Society. He has served as the senior Fulbright Lecturer to Argentina in 1983 and Korea in 1995 and was the Hampton

Freeman Professor of American History at the John Hopkins Nanjing University Graduate Center in Nanjing, China 1998 to 1999 and in 2014. He was awarded the Robert Kelly Memorial Award from the National Council of Public History for lifetime achievement. What truly an honor and what great work you've done.

Thank you very much, Dr. Devine.

Devine: Well thanks. I'm delighted to be with you.

Harry S. Truman, U.S. president, what a story he had. As a background he served as a vice president for four months and all of a sudden you're the president now Mr. VP and from what I've read in history I don't know how popular history will call it for the moment is that he was not aware of the Manhattan Project I find that hard to believe but I've heard that story before and all of a sudden he has to decide whether to drop it on Japan or not and that starts up a position of post World War II that I believe we're still living in today it's not a history issue it's it just started there but it's still going into over us the effects of the Cold War post World War II NATO etc but those are issues you know far more about it than I do so thank you very much for being on the program?

Sanchez: Where do we begin?

Devine: Okay, well we can begin where you suggest with Truman becoming president and holding his first cabinet meeting. As you suggest that Truman becoming president created a new era in American foreign relations to some extent. I think you could say the Cold War begins with Truman's decision to use the atomic weapons to end the war against Japan. The day after Roosevelt died and Truman had only been Vice President for 81 full days and during that time we'd only met on two occasions with President Roosevelt. They were not close at all. Roosevelt never briefed Truman on anything. Truman did not attend cabinet meetings. The two times he was with Roosevelt other people was present including the press so nothing of any substance was discussed. So at the first cabinet meeting, he had the day after he was quickly inaugurated, following Roosevelt's sudden death, Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, was then about 80 years old and was a republican but had been brought in by Roosevelt to assure bipartisan support for the war effort. Stimson called Truman aside and said he wanted to meet with him as soon as possible and at that meeting, Stimson told Truman about the Manhattan Project and the development of the atomic bomb. Now Truman knew there was a secret weapons program going on and he knew it was huge because as a senator he had chaired a committee, a special committee, to try to eliminate graft, corruption, mismanagement, and misspending the among military contractors during the Second World War and his committee by all accounts was very effective in saving millions maybe at that time billions of dollars. So it was an important role he played in the United States Senate but he had been told by General Marshall, who was the Chief of Staff, essentially Army head of the United States Army, that there was a secret weapons program going on and that Truman should not investigate that just leave it alone. Truman respected Marshall. He did not look into the secret weapons program which was by some accounts the largest single budgetary item in the military budget at that time was a huge project with aspects of the Manhattan Project going on in Chicago, Berkeley in California, New Mexico, and Tennessee. I mean it was just an amazingly complex project even when Truman was briefed by Stimson. I doubt that he understood what the atomic bomb would do. I mean Truman was not a physicist. He was not a scientist. He had never attended college other than some night school after graduating from the local high school in Independence (Missouri) but he was a pretty savvy guy and he knew this was this bomb would be extremely powerful. But in fairness to Truman, even a lot of the scientists weren't convinced that the bomb would work or if it did how much damage it would do. They didn't know about the lingering

effects of radiation and some wondered if the bomb might be so powerful it would blow up the entire world so there was a lot of uncertainty on everyone's part about the bomb from whether it would blow up the entire world or whether it would be a complete dud but it was suddenly on Truman's shoulders to decide if that weapon would be used and how it would be used to end the war. Truman's main goal as president, his birthday was May 8th which was VE Day (Victory in Europe Day 1945) in Europe so the European war had ended just a couple of weeks after Truman became president but there was still the war going on in Japan, against Japan, and it appeared that the war might go on against Japan for another couple of years that Japan still held areas in the Pacific, huge vast territories in China, all of Korea, Taiwan, and French Indochina was under their control so to invade the home islands and bring about the complete surrender of Japan seemed a long way off and given the Japanese use of suicide bombers, the kamikazes, the tremendous casualty in the thousands to tens of thousands that they had recently inflicted on the United States at Okinawa and Iwo Jima it looked like it was going to be a pretty grim task for at least another year to end that war. So Truman's main goal was to decide how best to end the war as quickly as possible with the fewest American casualties besides looking at the potential of using the atomic bomb. Truman was very anxious to get the Soviet Union involved in the war against Japan. The Soviet Union in Japan had been at odds but not at war throughout the Second World War the Soviet Union was preoccupied with defeating Germany and Japan of course had its issues on the mainland of China and against the United States. So when Truman met in Potsdam (Germany) in July with Stalin and Churchill, his primary goal there was to get Stalin's agreement to enter the war against Japan and Stalin agreed to do that. Truman felt this was a great diplomatic victory on his part to get that commitment from Stalin and believe that once the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan, it would be all over for the Japanese. Of course, we know from history the first bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, on Hiroshima, and then three days later a bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Now it is true that Truman authorized the use of the atomic bombs but he did not order their use in the sense of telling the military when to use the bomb and against which target. At the Truman Library, we had no document, no signed order, to use the bomb. What we do have or what we still have at the Truman Library is a telegram that Truman received while he was at Potsdam saying that the test in New Mexico, at the Trinity Test Site (Alamogordo, NM) had been successful. Truman wrote on the back of that printed telegram that in response to the telegram he gave the number of it in response to yours of whatever use when ready or deploy when ready but not before August 2nd and the reason was Truman wanted to be away from Potsdam and on the Atlantic or back in Washington when the bomb was dropped not in Potsdam, Germany with Joseph Stalin. Now Truman did tell Stalin not about the atomic bomb in any detail but he told him that the United States had developed a new weapon that would be used against Japan and may bring the war to an early conclusion even as the Soviet Union entered the war.

Sanchez: My research was that Stalin already knew about all this.

Devine: He did, he may have known more about it than Truman did he had spies all over the place so he probably knew earlier and in more detail or certainly as much detail as Truman did about the bomb. Truman even writes to his wife Bess that Truman said that Stalin didn't seem very moved by this or concerned he just said oh well I hope you'll use it to good effect. But yeah Stalin knew all about it.

Sanchez: Was president Truman's view of Stalin and president and sort of what he saw Stalin if he had a vision after the war?

Devine: Well again we go by Truman's letters to his wife Bess that he wrote from Potsdam (Germany) I mean they're great letters they deal with all kinds of stuff not only his meeting with Churchill and Stalin but his difficulty in finding a bottle of CHANEL No. Five perfume the best that's that told him to pick up while he was in Europe I guess that was hard to find but Stalin the Truman believed that

Stalin as he writes that he was tough a tough negotiator but honest. I think he used the word honest to mean you know he tells you what he wants right up front he doesn't beat around the bush direct kind of guy, but Truman felt he could work with Stalin and deal with Stalin. That trust and that optimism began to break down pretty rapidly as the war ended. The Soviets did follow through on their commitment to enter the war against Japan but they did it a week earlier than they had suggested they would, in fact, the day after the nuclear devices were used they declared war on Japan. The second nuclear bomb on Nagasaki was on August 9th. Appears to have been something of a surprise to Truman. Truman told them he knew three bombs had been developed they were different in design and again it wasn't really clear if they would work Truman didn't cite any particular date or target he left that to the military and I think was a little bit surprised when the second bomb was used on August 9th.

Sanchez: The plutonium one was used in the second term. Why was he surprised? I don't get it. Well, he knew that like did he want to know or did he not want to know.

Devine: Well, I think Truman felt that the military in the Pacific would use the bomb and then would wait a while to see what kind of reaction came from the Japanese government and to what kind of damage had been inflicted because on the 10th of August. Truman had another cabinet meeting where he tells his cabinet members there will be no more use of the atomic bomb without my authorization in writing. That this is a this is not a regular weapon. Truman was saying it was already getting reports about the tremendous devastating state of Hiroshima and the civilian casualties. I think Truman believed somehow that Hiroshima was a military target and that somehow this weapon would be used to destroy military targets and in these cases, there's always some collateral damage. Well, the way the atomic bomb is used it is dropped on a civilian target downtown the military installations become the collateral damage so Truman began to get these reports and I think he was he was shocked about the number of civilian casualties and was shocked to a lesser extent or at least surprised that the second bomb was being used just three days later. So in knowing there was a third bomb in route he put a stop to it you know we're not going to use it anymore. It won't be the military's decision, it'll be my decision and that's the way it's been in the United States ever since that only the president can authorize the use of the atomic weapons.

Sanchez: You know, I'll share that my wife and I have been very honored to be in both of those cities (in Japan) within the last five years. So to walk down the streets of both those cities and be at the zero point, especially in Nagasaki, it is a moving experience and it's still there. The aura of the horrors of war is still very present.

Devine: So yeah well and you know the certainly was a horrific event both of the bombings were just terrible and devastating and you know people are still to this day suffering from what took place then. However, the use of atomic weapons did bring the war to a rapid conclusion but probably not the way Truman thought it would. I think current scholarship looks at the way the Japanese surrendered and the messages that went back and forth between the United States and Japan over a period of several days after the second atomic bomb was used and remember we didn't have diplomatic relations with Japan so these things these messages are going through Switzerland and you're crossing international datelines. I mean you don't know Truman could not have a Zoom meeting with the Japanese.

Sanchez: There was no red (phone line) at the time right?

Devine: Yeah and so they're trying to finesse this issue of what would be the role of the emperor. Would the emperor be tried as a war criminal? Henry L. Stimson, the U.S, Secretary of War, who

knew quite a bit about Japan said well we need the emperor as much as the Japanese need their emperor because he'll bring about a peaceful society and it will be easier for us to occupy Japan if the emperor is not tried as a war criminal if he's there as a form of a constitutional monarch but the use of the atomic bomb gave the Japanese government officials a chance to surrender with some degree of dignity. This was very important to them. When you look at the surrender documents and the way the things went back and forth, the Japanese were saying, well, we will end hostilities they didn't remember exactly to use the word surrender but because the United States has used this inhumane weapon so suddenly the rules of war have changed and of course, the Japanese didn't mention Pearl Harbor or the "Rape of Nanking" or any of these things that were going on but kind of putting this on the United States of how the United States now our opponents are using this terrible inhumane weapon so we have so for the good of humanity we are going to end hostilities and you know terminate our you know bring our troops back and that sort of thing.

Sanchez: Funny in a strange way, actually the end of World War II did not cause the Cold War as far as I know. The Cold War sort of evolved and then became official in one of the speeches by Truman from what I read. Could you elaborate on what happened that brought on the Cold War that in many ways people say now we're in Cold War II?

Devine: Well, I think what brings the Cold War on is two fundamentally different views of how the post-Cold War world should look. I think Stalin believed that once the war ended, communism and the communist philosophy, would advance not only throughout Eastern Europe but all of Europe, much of Asia, and even the United States. Stalin seemed to believe that the United States society would become unstable following the war that the Great Depression would return there was some concern among leaders in the United States, including Truman, that this might happen. With 13-million men and women suddenly leaving the military and returning to civilian life how would the country absorb that kind of a workforce? Would there be long lines of unemployment? Certainly, there was immediate inflation and price increases and this sort of thing. So there was some disruption but things soon leveled out and in fact because of government spending in my view at least the government spending on the G.I. Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) and then later by the mid-1950 the huge investment in the military this was an economic stimulant that fueled the post-war recovery in the United States or decades and still does to some extent. Stalin had this vision that the Soviet Union would advance. The United States had another vision that there would be democratic governments as a result of the liberation that would be brought about because of the defeat of Germany and Japan that there would be free democratic societies in Eastern Europe, particularly Poland. I mean, the World War in Europe began because of the German and Soviet invasion of Poland. But when it was clear that wasn't going to come about that the Soviets were going to dominate the government of Poland with their communist regime the same was going to be true in the Balkans and Hungary and even in the Czech Republic. This caused great consternation in Washington. Meanwhile, the defeat of the Japanese didn't bring about the liberation of former European colonies in Asia. The French wanted back into Indochina which included not only north and south Vietnam but Cambodia and Laos as well. The Dutch and the British wanted their colonies back and this wasn't what the United States wanted but the United States felt it had no choice but to go along because these are European allies, particularly the British, but to a lesser extent, the French claimed they needed these counties to bring about their economic recovery and the recovery of Western Europe. So suddenly the United States found itself involved in confronting communist-backed regimes in Europe and communist-backed insurrections in Asia. The most significant being the Soviet support for Mao Zedong and his communist in China. This flareup of the civil war in China just as soon as the Japanese forces withdrew and of course, an additional trouble spot was the Korean peninsula where it had been agreed at Potsdam that the Korean peninsula would be temporarily divided along the 38th parallel with the

Soviets taking the surrender of Japanese forces north to 38th parallel the Americans south of 38th parallel that this would keep and meant to be a very temporary demarcation line only to avoid confusion or overlapping or even unintended conflicts between the Soviet soldiers and the American soldiers on the Korean Peninsula. Well, of course, this soon became a permanent dividing line and it was clear within a year or two of the end of the Korean War or end of the Second World War, the Soviets intended to stay in North Korea and build a communist regime under Kim Il-sung who was like some of their leaders that they installed in Eastern European countries.

Sanchez: Can I ask what made Korea such a strategic place location being that he had you know the other countries as well in the area? What made Korea so special?

Devine: Well, Korea has always been a strategic location because it's the closest landmass to Japan. I mean, it's the closest Asian landmass to the Japanese home islands so it's always been kind of a stopping off point for invasions of Japan or Japanese invasions of Asia that they have to go through Korea at least they did until the invention of the airplane and missiles and so forth South Korea has traditionally been a nation that's been caught in the middle. It's sometimes Koreans refer to themselves, as you know, the small fish surrounded by whales. Russia or the Soviet Union for a time China and Japan but at the time Korea was divided at the Potsdam negotiations, in fact, none of the major power none of the leaders of major powers Truman, Stalin Churchill then Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee during the meetings in Potsdam. None of them paid much attention to Korea quite frankly. It had been a Japanese colony for 35 years there was a very active Korean community in the United States led by people like Syngman Rhee or Lee Seungman, his Korean name, advocating for independence for Korea they've been decided early on during the Second World War going back to the Cairo conference that at the end of the war Korea would be granted independence but not much thought had been given to just how this independence would come about and while there were and there were various factions that had different ideas about how it should come about ranging from Syngman Rhee who returns to Korea immediately upon war's end wants to build a democratic society based on western ideas of democracy and Christianity. Syngman Rhee was a Protestant minister as well as a political advocate um and then the other extreme was the Soviet model and its chief principal leader was Kim Il-sung a young man who had served in the Soviet military and spoke Russian as well as he spoke Korean and came in with the Russian or the Soviet military to establish his regime in the north. South Korea became something of a hot spot in the Cold War kind of by accident without really much thought to its historic strategic importance and not much thought was given to this temporary dividing line that soon became a permanent marker.

Sanchez: Well I can see where the attention of the United States and your European powers were focusing on rebuilding Europe it was in disarray themselves and especially how to divide Germany et cetera so I don't think Korea was really on the radar other than maybe an item 28 down at the bottom of the list of concerns but it was on that list one of the sorts of the thing of moving ahead a little bit is why did Truman create the CIA and the NSA because, on the one hand, Truman seems to be a very positive outlook person you know creating a NATO and Marshall Plan trying to figure out how to help society you know getting people away from a sense of isolationism and becoming more views of sharing the world's perspective and needs. But at the same time way in the backroom in secret, he creates this law to create these two agencies which never went through Congress and then heavy amounts of money were budgeted for these two agencies. What was this thinking of creating these two agencies (CIA and NSA)?

Devine: Well, you're right that Truman was just an idealist and we can see his idealism in the creation of the United Nations. I mean it wasn't necessarily Truman's idea to have the United Nations but he felt very strongly that there should be some international body that would help bring about conflict

resolution and the conflicts in the future should be decided through some kind of negotiations through international law. Truman was a great admirer of a former democratic press soldier he'd been an artillery captain in World War I and saw the devastation in Europe of that war believed future wars needed to be avoided at all cost uh was very disappointed as a citizen that the United States didn't enter the League of Nations and that the League of Nations was weakened because of the United States absence and because the League of Nations did not act early on to confront Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and some of their advances made in Europe. In that sense, he's very much an idealist. He's also a very pragmatic guy. I mean his political life began in his late 30s early 40s as a county commissioner in Kansas City, Missouri Kansas Jackson County was the county and he was very much aligned with the democratic political machine in Kansas City which is a very corrupt machine (politically speaking). It was led by a gentleman named Tom Pendergast and because of you know working in the day-to-day county administration. Truman realized that sometimes idealistic notions had to conform with political realities on the ground. So Truman could make compromises and could make deals while still maintaining what he felt was his integrity. As the Cold War developed as the tensions between the United States and western allies and the Soviet Union worsened from late 1945 to 1946 and Truman was persuaded that the United States needed a better intelligence gathering apparatus along with the dismantling of the armed forces Almost immediately after the end of the Second World War, with the surrender of Japan, and to some extent even before that, my mother sent Harry Truman a letter in 1945 arguing that soldiers in Europe, which included my father, he had left for the Normandy invasion several months before I was born and had survived the Normandy invasion and the Battle of the Bulge and was now being told it was he and his fellow soldiers should get prepared to go to East Asia for the invasion of Japan. My mother, I have never seen this letter and we looked around in the Truman Library when I was director there to see if that might still be there but they didn't keep all the correspondence that came in but at any rate, she told me that "this is not fair that these guys who fought in Europe, they won so it should be other soldiers who go to the fire". So there was, you know, and even people in who the soldiers who had been in the Far East they were anxious to come home. They weren't anxious to go and invade the Japanese so much tremendous pressure to dismantle the military to bring soldiers home and as soon as the war was over this is a great relief along with this dismantling of the military Truman saw no further need for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) which was the forerunner of the CIA and the NSA and other intelligence-gathering organizations. But as things got worse he was convinced that by 1949 to reestablish the Central Intelligence Agency and of its one of the agency's first failures was failing to warn the administration that the North Koreans were about to attack South Korea. They were looking elsewhere in Europe the middle east uh Iran seemed like a possibility there was concern about the Chinese under Mao Zedong invading Taiwan or Formosa as it was called in popularly. The French and Indochina were having trouble, so there were trouble spots all over the world including the DMZ (demilitarized zone) but the CIA failed to pick up and adequately warn Truman and others in the administration of the extent of the build-up of the North Korean military with Soviet tanks and airplanes.

Sanchez: Yes the whole idea is that the whole atmosphere was unknown. It was sort of in question what happened it was the it's almost like the U.S. ended up being surprised.

Devine: Yes, I think there's no doubt that the United States was surprised but it was a complex situation on the Korean peninsula the United States knew that the North Korean military was supported by the Soviet Union and that Kim Il-sung had Soviet military advisors and equipment at the same time. Syngman Rhee or Lee Seungman, the leader of South Korea, was talking about attacking the North and he was asking for not only more economic aid from the United States but more military aid including heavy tanks and airplanes, modern aircraft, and Truman's administration was reluctant to give these things to him in part because they were concerned about budgetary issues. Truman was a balanced budget guy and the military had a large budget even before the Korean war but there was a

concern that if the South Koreans had tanks and aircraft they might attack the North and start a war so the Korean War started as my fellow historian John Lewis Gaddis has pointed out the Korean War began because Stalin wanted a war and Truman didn't.

Sanchez: Okay, so sort of a soft spot that if I move in they're not going to retaliate.

Devine: Yes, I think that Stalin was convinced by Kim IL-sung that the North Koreans had a large number of cadres in South Korea that would rise and rebel against Syngman Rhee that the North Koreans would be welcomed as heroes that the war would only last a few days.

Sanchez: Doesn't this sound like the sort of the verbiage that I remember invading the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. It sounds almost identical.

Devine: Yes, indeed it is very much like that. Now and there's there are some who believe that Kim II-sung knew this was a lie that he was telling Stalin that he knew his cadres in the South of the DMZ had been decimated by the ruthless policies of Syngman Rhee that he had wiped out a lot of the communist cadres and many of their sympathizers as well as hundreds and hundreds of innocent people who were union leaders or reform-minded politicians who were imprisoned and some later even executed. That Kim may have seen the invasion in June as his last chance to have any support at all in the South but whatever the true case the Korean war that began on June 25, 1950, would not have happened if Stalin hadn't given Kim II-sung the green light and Mao Zedong was also informed of this invasion would take place and that he may be called upon at some point to help out a little bit.

Sanchez: Which he did as well in history a little bit. Well, unfortunately, we're getting close to the end of this show with this portion and I'm just really I think we're barely starting to open the page of chapter one in reality and all this area but you know I do want to highlight that the YouTube behind me is part of the CIA projects and it's all under Harry Truman's Era of starting it and then moving up to the SR-71. So I think in many ways these were not planes of attack. They were planes of negotiation where they could bring in the facts and say "you know we're not going to be caught off guard or by surprise and start a war attitude" so again, I applaud this foresight to be able to allow the agencies to create this kind of weaponry for the protection of the world which is still in use even today and again so his policy and his views are still very active today in new formats but still very active. So, Dr. Devine, I want to thank you for being on our program please say thank you to your beautiful wife Maija Rhee Devine whom I've had the pleasure and the honor of having her in other shows as well and her work as well and looking at women had their treatment during World War II by the Japanese and her continual work so big applause to her and both of you for keeping us aware of the dangers and how conflict evolves and how it can be prevented so I want to thank you for that so glad to be with you so we're going to be we're going to call you in on other shows and continue this and dialogue some more and the issue about NATO, the Marshall Plan et cetera it's just fantastic information. Thank you very much for being on the show, Dr. Divine. I hope to have you back again very soon.

Devine: Well, thank you. I'll look forward to it.