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Book Reviews

Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power by Lou Cannon. New York, Public Affairs, 2003. 592 pp. \$30.00.

Former *Washington Post* staff writer Lou Cannon is the leading chronicler of the life and political career of Ronald Reagan. Cannon covered Reagan back during the gubernatorial era and then through the presidential campaigns and presidential years. He knows every detail of Reagan's life and career, as well as all the major players who surrounded Reagan. His years of covering Reagan and his access to Reagan's people pay off wonderfully in this and other books he has written on Reagan. Indeed, this is Cannon's fifth book on the former president, going back to the 1969 publication of *Ronnie and Jesse: A Political Odyssey*.

There is, therefore, some significant overlap with some of Cannon's earlier Reagan books. For example, the four chapters on the 1976 and 1980 campaigns draw largely from the 1982 volume, *Reagan*. But this overlap does not detract from the value of this latest volume as a stand-alone study. Few readers will have absorbed Cannon's four previous books on the subject. There is real value as well to having much of the earlier material integrated into this volume on Reagan's governorship. And at over 500 pages of text, perhaps there is even too much of a good thing here, although one will not find a more comprehensive review and analysis of the Reagan gubernatorial years.

The book is segmented into three major sections, with just one of these covering the Reagan governorship. The first section traces his early life, his screen acting career, and his eventual entrance into politics. The second provides a detailed overview of the gubernatorial years. The third is largely duplicative material about Reagan's presidential campaigns, followed by a brief review of his presidency. Although section two is the most original and valuable overall, it is helpful to have included the other sections to place into one text a broad-ranging look at how the early years led Reagan toward politics and affected his governorship and then, most significantly, how his governorship affected Reagan's national political career.

Cannon based much of his analysis on numerous personal interviews with Reagan insiders. He also gained access to many original gubernatorial records that Reagan associates shared with him. The Reagan Library and the Reagan

Presidential Foundation provided Cannon with access to even more materials, many of which have not been used by other Reagan researchers. Thus, the wealth of new material makes this volume a worthy resource for scholars.

Cannon's analysis throughout is sensible and fair-minded. He is neither a Reagan-basher nor a sycophant. To be sure, those on both of these sides in the battle to define Reagan will find bits and pieces from the book to confirm their own views. For Reagan critics, for example, Cannon provides a tough critique of the president's environmental record, made all the more devastating by the author's meticulous review of Reagan's much more balanced gubernatorial record on conservation issues. Nonetheless, the portrait that emerges is of a man who was much smarter and savvier than his critics ever allowed. But also, Cannon pictures Reagan as much more moderate and pragmatic than most conservative Reagan-worshippers will admit.

Governor Reagan is a fine addition to the literature concerning the former politician. Without a doubt, Reagan will be one of the twentieth century's most thoroughly analyzed presidents, along with FDR, Truman, JFK, Nixon, and Clinton. Like those of Nixon's and Clinton's legacies, especially, people's views of Reagan's legacy will clash considerably for many years. Lou Cannon's many books will remain useful and even-handed accounts of the Reagan years for a long time to come.

MARK J. ROZELL
George Mason University

Reaganism and the Death of Representative Democracy by Walter Williams. Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 2003. 306 pp. \$26.95.

The American system of Madisonian representative democracy is in serious disrepair: a passive electorate is largely disengaged from its civic responsibilities, profit-driven media sensationalizing politics does little to inform serious political deliberation, government agencies are set up for failure, and moneyed interests distort congressional policy choices. Walter Williams's chronicle of these deficiencies is not simply one more academic jeremiad (something he hopes to avoid), but is instead a serious and thoughtful critique of the state of democratic governance in the United States. At the heart of this critique is the assertion that "Reaganism," which now dominates the basic character of American politics, is the key trigger in the decline of effective governing institutions and the country's movement toward outright plutocracy.

Reaganism connotes a political movement that is not quite a systematic ideology but is instead a blend of several unchallengeable principles (state and local government is superior to federal authority, which should be extremely circumscribed; unregulated capitalism is a costless system yielding future prosperity; necessary self-reliance equates to few social welfare obligations for gov-