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THREE BEARS

by

JAMES H. ANDREWS

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Three Bears

The three bears I'm going to talk about tonight are not three football players who lost their way en route to the Super Bowl. Nor are they the bears that Goldilocks encountered after eating their porridge. These are California bears.

The California state flag, you may remember, shows the image of a grizzly bear. There is a star in the upper left corner, and under the bear are the words "California Republic."

But the bear, seen from the side, facing to the left, standing on all four legs, is front and center. It dominates the scene. Grizzly bears are creatures we cannot ignore. Their stature, their size, their strength, suggest we should not ignore them.

The subject tonight is three powerful figures of California. They affected the lives of all of us, these men. They were three of the most important leaders of our nation in the twentieth century, all three men of California. They are Earl Warren, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan.

In recognition of their political party affiliation, I might have identified them as three elephants. But one of the traditions of California politics is nonpartisanship, real or imaginary. And

THREE BEARS

indeed, despite their Republican credentials, each of these men was in one way or another, at one time or another, a Democrat.

Ronald Reagan, of course, was born and raised in Illinois. But he set his sights on Hollywood and the movies, and at the age of twenty-six he moved to California. It was his home for the rest of his life. He moved to Washington just before his seventieth birthday, and happily went back home after eight years in the White House. On arriving in Los Angeles the day his presidency ended, Reagan said, "When you have to stay eight years away from California, you live in a perpetual state of homesickness."¹

Richard Nixon was born and raised in California, and lived with his parents until he graduated from college. But as a child, he recalls in his *Memoirs*, "Sometimes at night I was awakened by the whistle of a train, and then I dreamed of the far-off places I wanted to visit someday."² Nixon made his life in Washington and New York, and, in a sense, the world. He returned to California only to run for office or to recover after defeat. After every return, after a few years, he moved back East.

Earl Warren was a true son of the Golden State—born in Los Angeles, raised in Bakersfield in the Central Valley, a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and its law school. Before he left to become chief justice of the United States in 1953, at age sixty-two, he served as an elected official—county prosecutor, attorney general, and governor of the state for almost three terms.

For a long time the rest of the country saw California as a land of make-believe, a place in which a person from somewhere else could make a new life, even make himself into a new person. From the gold diggers of the gold rush to the gold diggers of Hollywood, there was freedom and opportunity. Many people who went into politics saw that, too. The lives of these three men, especially the years they spent in California—our focus

THREE BEARS

here—give us a chance to look at some fifty years of American politics.

Earl Warren

Earl Warren lived in Bakersfield with his parents and older sister from the time he was five. When he was seventeen, en route to Berkeley to enroll at the university, Warren took the train to Oakland, then rode a ferry across the bay to San Francisco, where he would spend the night.

More than fifty years later he remembered that ride: “I stood on the bow of the ferryboat, surveying the beautiful bay and looking over to the Golden Gate.” He compared the “arid landscape” and long, hot summers in the San Joaquin Valley to the “cool sea breeze,” which he found “exhilarating beyond description.” “I filled my lungs with refreshing air and said to myself, ‘I never want to live anywhere else the rest of my life.’ And I have really never changed my mind.”³ He never lived in Bakersfield again, but he spoke fondly of California the rest of his life.

Warren’s parents came to this country as infants, his father from Norway, his mother from Sweden. They moved from Minneapolis to Los Angeles before he was born in March 1891. His father, after joining a strike against the Southern Pacific railroad, later found work with the same company in Bakersfield, a town of 4,800 in 1900, and stayed there until retirement.

His father taught Warren to read and sent him to school at age five. When he was twelve, he entered high school. His father financed his son’s entire education—including books, music lessons, and lectures. Warren learned to play the clarinet well, and at fifteen joined the musicians union. He always worked part-time jobs—one was delivering ice—so that although he loved sports, he wrote later, he had no time for organized athletics.

THREE BEARS

Much of Warren's free time was spent with his "friend and constant companion for years," a burro named Jack. Warren and Jack "rode around the county in every direction."⁴ One day Warren heard that the city marshal and a deputy sheriff had been killed in a shooting. "That was enough information for Jack and me," he said.⁵ They went to investigate what became a celebrated case. When he was in high school (on a bicycle by this time), Warren often stopped at the courthouse to see trial lawyers in action, and resolved to be a lawyer himself.

At Berkeley Warren joined a fraternity and was active in student life, and by his own admission paid little attention to scholarship. He attended the law school while working part-time in a law office and was admitted to the bar in 1914.

Law and order

Warren was in government and politics all his adult life. He served briefly in the army during the First World War. In 1920, at the age of twenty-nine, he became deputy district attorney for Alameda County, which then had a population of 216,000. He intended to leave the prosecutor's office after a few years, but was fascinated and absorbed by the work. Less than five years later, the board of supervisors appointed him to fill a vacancy as district attorney. The salary of the district attorney was sufficient to persuade him that he could marry later that year.

Warren won the job on his own with an overwhelming victory at the polls in the next election, and was reelected twice, serving as a prosecutor for a total of nineteen years. He was a law-and-order prosecutor, crusading against gambling, bootlegging, and public corruption—he sent the sheriff to prison. He was tough, efficient, and incorruptible. When in 1938, at age forty-seven, he was elected attorney general of California, he considered that an executive position, not subject to political pressures. He prosecuted Communists and labor activists as well, and

supported the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

As the war approached, Warren assumed leadership of preparedness efforts, infuriating the governor, a Democrat. The irritated Warren decided he should be in charge, so he ran for governor himself and won. He was easily reelected in 1946 and 1950. He was the only man elected governor of California three times until Jerry Brown's victory last year.

Nonpartisanship

Warren's outlook was in tune with California tradition. When he became governor, he hung just one photograph in his office, that of Hiram Johnson. Johnson, the great Progressive—and Republican—was governor for eight years beginning in 1911. He was Warren's hero.

The Progressives' objective was to destroy corruption and the influence of money in politics, the enablers of that influence—big corporations, such as the Southern Pacific, and the political parties. They instituted a direct primary, civil service regulation, women's suffrage, and the initiative, referendum, and recall. All local and county offices became nonpartisan by law.

In primary elections for state office, involving political parties, the new legislation permitted candidates to cross-file, that is, to seek nomination in any and all political parties. By the 1950s more than 80 percent of all candidates were running on both the Democratic and Republican tickets. It wasn't until 1952 that the primary ballot even identified candidates by political party. In two elections Warren was the nominee of both Republican and Democratic parties. His slogan was "Leadership—Not Politics."⁶ He cultivated the appearance of not striving for office. And he was well equipped to stand for election as an individual above the political fray.

In person and in photographs as governor, Warren was not

THREE BEARS

the solemn and somewhat forbidding figure shown in pictures of the chief justice. I met him in the spring of 1960, at the dedication of the new law school building at the University of Chicago, and was amazed by his size—he was reportedly not much taller than I, if at all, but he was a huge presence, and at the same time extraordinarily cordial.

“With twinkling blue eyes and an easy warmth in his massively handsome face,” one writer says, “Warren was in some ways an authentic genius of the new California method, a politician without visible politics, a candidate running above mere candidacy.”⁷

Warren’s great skill was building support so he could win elections, run the government, and achieve legislative success without heavy opposition. As governor he expanded programs and institutions to serve California’s enormous growth in population, and raised taxes, but saved wartime surpluses for use during peacetime. He proposed a state plan for universal health insurance, but failed to pass it. His memoir talks with pride about the people he appointed to office, the problems he solved, the growth and prosperity of the state, and his resistance to lobbyists pursuing narrow, private interests. He loved being governor, and by his style and actions, shaped California politics for years to come.

Republican

Despite his nonpartisan style, Warren was in 1948 the Republican nominee for vice president of the United States, running with presidential nominee Thomas E. Dewey, governor of New York. They were unsuccessful, and in 1952 Warren set his sights on the presidency itself. He campaigned in Wisconsin and Oregon, but won few delegates. Hoping for a deadlocked convention, he obtained the California delegation’s unanimous support as a favorite son. Richard Nixon, then senator and a

THREE BEARS

delegate, supported Warren in public, but worked behind the scenes for Dwight Eisenhower. Warren never forgave Nixon, who became Eisenhower's running mate.

Years later Warren administered the presidential oath of office to Nixon. Immediately after the ceremony, Warren told one of Nixon's aides that if not for Nixon, he might have taken the presidential oath himself in 1953.

After Eisenhower's election, the president promised Warren the first vacant seat on the Supreme Court. When the first vacancy was created by the sudden death of the chief justice, and the president had second thoughts, Warren maneuvered to insist that Eisenhower keep his promise.

Warren joined the court in October 1953 at the age of sixty-two and served sixteen years. In June 1968, foreseeing Nixon's election as president, Warren told President Johnson he would resign that year, allowing Johnson to name a new justice. But Johnson's nominee came under attack and withdrew his name, so Warren remained on the bench, at Nixon's request, until the following June, resigning when his successor was confirmed.

Warren died five years later at the age of eighty-three and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. President Nixon escorted Mrs. Warren to the funeral at the National Cathedral. Less than a month later, Nixon, facing impeachment, resigned as president.

Richard Nixon

Richard Milhous Nixon was born in Yorba Linda, California, a community of two hundred people, in 1913. He was younger than Earl Warren by twenty-two years, almost a generation. Nixon's father had moved from Ohio to Southern California in 1907. When she was twelve, Nixon's mother, Hannah Milhous, and family moved from Indiana to Whittier, a tight-knit Quaker

THREE BEARS

community twenty-three miles east of Los Angeles. The Milhouses were refined, prosperous, and educated.

Nixon's father, after trying several occupations, established a gas station and general store and market in Whittier, a town of fifteen thousand, in 1920. Although Nixon, his mother, and his four brothers worked hard in the store and Nixon had other jobs from time to time, Jessamyn West, his cousin, says that "the idea that the key to Nixon was his early poverty is ridiculous. The Nixons had a grocery store, two cars, and sent their son to college. By some they were considered rich."⁸ Nixon's life in Whittier centered on family, church, and school.

But life was not easy. Nixon was the second son. Two of his brothers died, one at about seven, when Nixon was twelve. At the same time the family was making an enormous effort and draining family finances to care for the oldest son, who suffered from tuberculosis and died at twenty-three, when Nixon was in college.

Nixon's mother was quiet and modest, strong in her Quaker faith, his father a combative talker. Nixon learned debating skills from his father, whom he recalled as a hard-line Ohio Republican with populist and Progressive Party sympathies. When he was in high school, Nixon told a friend that he intended to study law, then go into politics.

The young Nixon "dreamed of going to college in the East,"⁹ but family finances were tight, and he lived at home while attending Whittier College. His happiest memories of those college days involved sports, Nixon wrote later. He played football, not well but persistently, and years later praised his coach: "He inspired in us the idea that if we worked hard enough and played hard enough, we could beat anybody. . . . He used to say, 'Show me a good loser, and I'll show you a loser.'"¹⁰

In his *Memoirs*, Nixon also cites influential teachers and courses. He earned good grades, founded an organization of

THREE BEARS

students who considered themselves outsiders, debated, acted in plays, and was elected student body president. Following his father and his teachers, his early thinking had, he says, “a very liberal, almost populist, tinge.”¹¹

Getting away

After graduating from college, Nixon made his first getaway, enrolling in the law school at Duke University. He made top grades and won election as president of the student bar association. In his final year he interviewed at several Wall Street law firms in New York and he applied to the FBI, but received no offers. He graduated in 1937 and went home to work in a small Whittier law firm. Three years later, he married Pat Ryan.

In early 1942, Nixon went to work at the Office of Price Administration and the couple moved to Washington. Eight months later he volunteered for the navy and served as a junior officer in the South Pacific supervising a cargo transfer operation, then had legal assignments in several stateside cities.

While still in the navy, Nixon was recruited by a group of small businessmen to run for Congress in a district east of Los Angeles in 1946. The incumbent was Jerry Voorhis, a popular Democrat who sought a sixth term. Nixon regarded the try for Congress as a risky venture. He and his wife did not have a house or car, only ten thousand dollars in savings to live on, and were expecting a baby. “We liked Whittier,” Nixon said. “But we also liked adventure.”¹² They were enthusiastic about the possibility of returning to Washington.

Nixon promised his backers a “rocking, socking campaign.”¹³ He harnessed his war veteran status, oratorical and debating skills, and diligent study of Voorhis’s record in Congress to challenge his much more casual opponent. The party’s national slogan that year was “Had enough? Vote Republican.” Voorhis had been the Republican as well as Democratic nominee

previously, but Nixon attacked him for left-wing views and an endorsement by the allegedly Communist-leaning CIO Political Action Committee.

Nixon's was one of many Republican victories in 1946, but Nixon was a star. "[B]ecause I had taken the risk of running against a New Deal liberal who seemed unbeatable," he wrote, "I was called a giant killer. By risking all, I had earned a national reputation even before I cast my first vote in Congress."¹⁴ He was thirty-three years old.

Wins and losses

Nixon's reputation—positive and negative—soared during his first term through his work as a member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He led a highly publicized investigation of Alger Hiss, a former high official in the State Department. Hiss was accused of spying for the Soviet Union and eventually sent to prison on perjury charges involving espionage. "The Hiss case, for the first time," Nixon recalled, "forcibly demonstrated to the American people that domestic Communism was a real and present danger to the security of the nation."¹⁵ Nixon also managed passage of the Mundt-Nixon Bill, providing for annual registration of members of the Communist Party.

In 1948 Nixon won both the Republican and Democratic nominations for Congress and coasted to reelection. The Hiss case was a turning point in his career. "Two years later," Nixon said, "I was elected to the United States Senate and two years after that, General Eisenhower introduced me as his running mate . . . as 'a man who has a special talent and an ability to ferret out any kind of subversive influence wherever it may be found, and the strength and persistence to get rid of it.'"¹⁶

Nixon's 1950 Senate opponent was Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas, an attractive former actress in movies and

on the stage and a liberal Democrat. Governor Warren was also on the California ballot that year, but Warren, as usual, did not endorse other candidates, rejecting ploys to lure him into support for Nixon.

Nixon fought a partisan, ideological campaign. His campaign made an aggressive attack on Helen Douglas—not all of it publicly linked to Nixon—portraying her not as a Red, as Communists were called in those days, but as “the Pink Lady,” a left-winger sympathetic to the Communists. Stung by the use of pink paper to print an attack on her, and other campaign tactics, Douglas gave Nixon a name that he never entirely shook off—“Tricky Dick.” Nixon won with 59 percent of the vote.

Nixon was elected vice president in 1952 and reelected in 1956. Four years later he was the Republican nominee for president, but lost to John F. Kennedy in a close race. Nixon carried California, but just barely, receiving 50.1 percent of the vote.

He returned to Los Angeles to practice law. Eisenhower and other Republicans urged him to run for governor in 1962, arguing it was necessary if he wanted to seek the presidency again. Nixon agonized over the decision. He was making a good income for the first time in his life; his wife hated the thought of another campaign; he was ignorant of many state issues; he was open to charges that he would use the Governor’s Mansion only as a steppingstone to the White House. And he did not want the job—but he ran anyway.

Governor Pat Brown, running for a second term, was a Democrat with bipartisan credentials—he had been a Republican early in his career. Energetic and smiling, Brown had made a good record, overseeing major expansion of the state university system and the highway network and spearheading the creation of a vast system that carried water from the rainy north to the dry south.

For Nixon, it was a rough, frustrating campaign. He faced

strong opposition in the primary and from conservative Republicans and members of the John Birch Society, including two California congressmen who were his good friends. Brown won easily.

On the morning after the election, a tired, angry Nixon told reporters in a televised press conference that he was through with politics and “you won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore.”¹⁷ He joined a New York law firm and the family moved to Fifth Avenue in June, expecting never to live in California again.

The long campaign

But Nixon was bored with the practice of law. Politics was his life. He loved to analyze power, political situations and prospects, domestic and foreign, and was very good at it. He took great satisfaction in traveling the world, meeting leaders of other countries, and measuring their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. But as Theodore Roosevelt wrote, in words Nixon quoted many times, “It is not the critic who counts. . . . The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.”¹⁸ Nixon wanted to be part of the action.

His career was long and tangled, his enemies often bitter, and by his own account, numerous and unrelenting. He was always defending himself, and describing the odds against him. But he persisted. From 1946 to 1972—twenty-six years—Nixon ran for public office nine times. Lyndon Johnson called him a “chronic campaigner,” and Nixon agreed.¹⁹

He campaigned even when he was not on the ballot: Five weeks for Barry Goldwater for president, countless trips for the Republican Party and candidates for Congress. In 1966 he even made a trip to Macomb, Illinois, to speak for the Republican candidate for superintendent of public instruction, later calling to ask for a copy of the candidate’s remarks. Nixon did not just

THREE BEARS

drop in and then go on his way. He sweated the details. A young Illinois Republican arranging a speech in Peoria remembered Nixon on the telephone, asking where the event would take place, saying the room was too big, then ordering a smaller room that would fill up and make the audience look larger.

In 1968 Nixon finally won the presidency in a three-man contest. His popular vote was 43.4 percent, less than one percentage point above the total for Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Former Governor George Wallace of Alabama received almost 14 percent. In 1972 Nixon won again, defeating Senator George McGovern in a landslide.

Less than two years later, after investigations and bitter public debate about the break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate building, Nixon resigned his office rather than face almost certain impeachment by the House of Representatives. He was sixty-one years old.

The Nixons moved to their house in San Clemente on the California coast. Five and a half years later, they moved to New York, where he died in 1994 at the age of eighty-one. He was buried in Yorba Linda, next to the house his father built.

Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan was twenty-six when he moved to Hollywood in 1937. And he did not seek public office until he was fifty-five. At that age Richard Nixon, born two years after Reagan, was elected president of the United States. Earl Warren at fifty-five was elected to a second term as governor of California.

Ronald Reagan's father worked as a salesman in stores and on the road. He changed jobs often, moving his family frequently from one small town to another in western Illinois. From age nine until he graduated from college, however, Reagan lived in Dixon, a town of about ten thousand people some hundred miles

west of Chicago. Besides his father, a Roman Catholic, the family included his mother, an active and committed member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and a brother two and a half years older.

Ronald Reagan was born on February 6, 1911. (Yesterday was his one-hundredth birthday.) Finances were tight and unpredictable, but Reagan didn't know that the family was poor, he said in an early autobiography. He had a number of jobs, and was accustomed to hard work. His vision without glasses was terrible, but he played enthusiastic football in high school and college and worked for six summers—twelve hours a day, seven days a week—as a lifeguard at a park on the Rock River. He went to his mother's church and acted in plays she organized for the community.

During his freshman year in college, Reagan saw a London play performed by a touring company in Rockford. "I knew then that I wanted to be an actor," he said many years later, "but it wasn't considered a way to make a living."²⁰ After that, he took every opportunity as a student to go on stage.

At Eureka College, a small Disciples of Christ institution near Peoria, Reagan was active in a host of activities, including his fraternity and student government; the classroom did not play an important part in Reagan's college life. On a visit to Eureka years later, Reagan said, "Everything good that happened to me—everything—started here on this campus."²¹

Show business and politics

After college graduation in 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, Reagan worked his way into radio broadcasting at stations in Davenport and Des Moines, Iowa. He eventually broadcast Chicago Cubs games from a Des Moines studio, using running reports on a telegraph machine to recreate the games on the air. He broadcast more than six hundred games he did not see.

THREE BEARS

Five years later he persuaded the station to send him to California (on his vacation) to cover the Chicago Cubs in spring training on Catalina Island. While there, he used a Des Moines friend to get him a screen test, the real purpose of his trip. Less than a week after his return to Iowa, Warner Brothers offered him a contract for seven years. He drove his convertible out to Los Angeles and never really moved away.

Over the next twenty-five years Reagan appeared in more than fifty films and as an actor and host on television. He married two movie actresses, Jane Wyman in 1940, and after a divorce, Nancy Davis in 1952. When World War II came, he received an army commission and assignment to an army film unit based in Los Angeles, where he spent the rest of the war making training films.

Reagan may have aimed for show business, but from a young age he was interested in politics. He was elected senior class president in high school, participated in a student strike as a freshman in college, and gave frequent public speeches beginning with his years in Des Moines. In 1942, when he was thirty-one years old, he wrote that his interests since college had been “dramatics, athletics and politics.”²²

Reagan’s education in practical politics came largely through the central role he played in the Screen Actors Guild, a Hollywood union. Beginning in 1947 he was elected president of the Guild for five consecutive one-year terms. The industry faced threats from foreign films and television, jurisdictional disputes among craft unions, and charges of Communist influence. He crossed picket lines to break the sometimes-violent strikes involving other unions. He learned there were Communist influences in the film industry and became a firm anti-Communist without attacking individuals. When he testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, he did not name Communist sympathizers, but he did at least

acquiesce in the blacklisting of actors, directors, and writers suspected of Communist sympathies. His initial presidency ended after five years, but the Guild brought him back as president for a sixth term in 1959 to lead negotiations with the movie producers, during which he led the Guild's first strike, a success for the actors.

Like his father, Ronald Reagan was a Democrat and admired President Roosevelt. He campaigned for President Truman and for Helen Gahagan Douglas despite Nixon's Pink Lady tactic. But like millions of other Democrats, Reagan voted for Eisenhower. When Nixon ran for president in 1960, Reagan delivered two hundred speeches as a "Democrat for Nixon." He changed his party affiliation to Republican in 1962.

On the road

Although he made a few more movies and appeared on television in the 1950s, Reagan also found employment as a spokesman for General Electric. He was host of the GE Hour on television and made appearances at company plants across the country. He was enormously successful. His speeches gradually evolved from selling GE to selling private enterprise and smaller government.

He enjoyed these tours. From an early age, as his biographers point out, he was a narrative storyteller, and he honed his skills on what he called "the mashed potato circuit."²³ He prepared much of his material himself. As a spokesman for business and later as a candidate for public office, he tried out new bits as he went along.

His career as an elected official can be traced to 1964, when, two days before the presidential election, he made a nationally televised, thirty-minute speech supporting Barry Goldwater.

The speech, Reagan biographer Lou Cannon tells us, was really a tuned and recycled version of the talk that Reagan, as a

THREE BEARS

Democrat, had been giving for years. David Broder of the *Washington Post* called it "the most successful political debut since William Jennings Bryan electrified the 1896 Democratic convention with his 'Cross of Gold' speech."²⁴ It resulted in one million dollars in campaign contributions for Republican candidates and encouraged Reagan's backers, who had financed the telecast, to push him to run for office.

Candidate and governor

By 1966, four years after Richard Nixon lost the race for governor, California was no longer the state that had voted for Earl Warren, or Pat Brown. The last few years had seen a revolt by its farm workers, African Americans rioting in the Watts section of Los Angeles, and student disorder at Berkeley. Many people who had voted Democratic, in Cannon's words, "blamed their grievances on government and no longer believed that they lived in the Golden State of their dreams and memories." In the words of the Democratic speaker of the California Assembly, "California was ripe for Ronald Reagan."²⁵

Reagan had a populist streak. He believed in citizen-politics. And although cross-filing had been eliminated by the time he ran for office, the political culture that produced it remained. Governor Brown, seeking a third term, was a career politician who had been in office for twenty-three years. He mocked Reagan as a Hollywood actor, without government experience, and underestimated Reagan's appeal as a citizen-politician.

Reagan won 58 percent of the vote. On election night, one observer wrote, Reagan used almost the same words to describe his victory as the Progressives had described theirs in 1910 and Warren his in the 1940s. "Let us remember that we didn't achieve any narrow partisan victory," Reagan said. "Many friends from the other party and the independents had a part in it too. . . . Partisanship ends as of today. . . ."²⁶

THREE BEARS

Governor Reagan's legacy, Cannon says, is "a tone of skepticism about liberal, expansionist government that persists to this day in California. Before Reagan, the prevailing view in Sacramento was that government should be a protective benefactor of the people. . . . Under Reagan, this faith was banished."²⁷

Faced immediately with a substantial budget shortfall, the new governor tried to impose economies and reduce state spending. "The symbol on our flag is a Golden Bear; it is not a cow to be milked," he said.²⁸

Yet within weeks Reagan proposed a sweeping tax package four times larger than the previous record increase obtained by Pat Brown, and the largest increase proposed by any governor in the nation's history. When it passed, the program was designed to bring in one billion dollars. During two terms in office, Reagan was able to erase the large deficit he inherited.

Reagan eyed the presidency from the time he became governor, and often traveled outside the state to make speeches. Two years after leaving the governor's office he mounted a serious campaign for the Republican nomination, but barely lost in the convention to the incumbent president, Gerald Ford.

Still playing the citizen-politician, Reagan persisted in his quest for the White House. He was not really a conservative or a Republican, one of his Washington advisors said. But he conveyed to the country the kind of optimistic populism that California had found so appealing. He won the presidency in 1980 and again in 1984.

After eight years in Washington, Reagan went home to California. In some ways, he never left. During his time in the White House, he spent the equivalent of a full year in California, most of it at his ranch near Santa Barbara. His body now lies not far away, at the Reagan Library, in Simi Valley, halfway between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles.

California Politics

The other day, thinking about Ronald Reagan and what he represents, I found myself remembering a familiar painting by Norman Rockwell. A tall, slender man with a weathered face and clothing is standing amidst his seated fellow townspeople in a community meeting. I wouldn't be surprised to hear him ask a question of officials in the front of the room, or make a straightforward statement about some policy of the town. I can even imagine that, at the request of the presiding officer, or of someone in the audience, he goes to the front of the room, perhaps as a temporary chairman or a newly elected selectman, and helps lead the group to a decision, or agrees to manage community affairs for a few years.

I can also imagine Earl Warren at the front of that room, probably as the chairman or executive officer, with his board, comfortable with the crowd and the setting, with an expansive agenda for the community that he intends to pursue. If Richard Nixon plays a role, he talks louder and more aggressively, and may irritate many people, but is maybe given a leadership position because he is regarded as the smartest man in the room and he fights for it.

Of course, politics in mid- and late-twentieth century United States was not like this. But many people wished it were so, and I would argue that a vision of the citizen-politician and nonpartisan government was part of the California dream. Because California was a very big state with a great many people, the key to leadership was the *appearance* of nonpartisanship and citizen leadership. Ronald Reagan acted the part honestly and, I think, believed in that vision. Earl Warren believed it, too, but with the added belief that government has an obligation, with attentive leadership and management by trained, capable, honest individuals, to build and, if necessary, expand, to meet the needs of the future.

THREE BEARS

Richard Nixon might have called himself a realist. He knew the dark side of human nature, even in the California Dream. He was ready to take risks and use tactics others shied away from, and made calculations for his own career and the country on that basis.

What these men did in California is not the basis of their fame. But California prepared them for national challenges and a place in history. In California, we can learn about these men, their skills and impulses, and the commitments they carried to the country at large.

Notes

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3. Earl Warren, *The Memoirs of Earl Warren* (New York: Madison Books, 2001), 33, 34.
4. *Ibid.*, 23.
5. *Ibid.*, 25.
6. Cannon, *President Reagan*, 43.
7. Roger Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 269.
8. *Ibid.*, 138.
9. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 14.
10. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
11. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
12. Richard M. Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat and Renewal* (New York: Pocket Books, 1991), 212.
13. Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon*, Vol. 1, *The Education of a Politician 1913-1962* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 123.
14. Nixon, *In the Arena*, 215.
15. Richard M. Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, New York: Giant Cardinal edition, 1962), 67.
16. *Ibid.*, 74.
17. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 245.
18. The quotation is at the beginning of Nixon, *In the Arena*, xi.
19. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 275, 278.
20. Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 29.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 83.
23. *Ibid.*, 108.
24. Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), 13.
25. Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 9.
26. Gladwin Hill, *Dancing Bear: An Inside Look at California Politics* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1968), 218. Ellipses appear in quoted passage in book.
27. Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 386.
28. *Ibid.*, 184.

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