

Reagan and Brown (1966) - II

Lead: Champion of liberalism, in 1966 California Governor Pat Brown eagerly awaited the election against a political novice from L.A. His optimism was misplaced.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Brown's glee was aroused by the prospect of running against Ronald Wilson Reagan, a washed up actor who had become General Electric's corporate spokesman in the 1950s. He was a rising conservative

political activist whose last-minute infomercial helped raise Republican spirits if not its vote count in the ill-fated Goldwater campaign of 1964. Brown thought he was a pushover and engaged in a little piece of political chicanery to help Reagan win. Brown's operatives released some political dirt about Reagan's opponent George Christopher. In the primary Reagan beat him badly.

Unexpectedly, Brown ran into problems in his own primary. Maverick conservative Democrat Los Angeles mayor Sam Yorty sounded like Reagan with vigorous rhetoric about free love, student disturbances, the Watts Riots and big government. People responded. They gave Yorty

38% of the vote and put Pat Brown in a precarious position. He had to prevent Yorty's votes from going to Reagan or the Governor would lose. Alarm went up in the Brown camp and they began to attack the former actor for his political extremism. It never took.

Ronald Reagan was the perfect candidate. Attractive, humorous, well-scripted and with the smoothest running campaign money could buy, he was the result of the decision by conservative Republicans that they no longer wished to occupy the ideological fringe of American politics, they wanted to win elections and govern. That would require compromise and

at least moderate-appearing candidates.

Brown did not know what hit him. Voters disgusted at Watts, Berkeley and weary after several generations of big government activism buried him in a million vote landslide. Reagan went on to preside over a revolution in state government and then in two terms as President the transformation of the national political conversation.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Dallek, Matthew. "Liberalism Overthrown," *American Heritage* (October 1996): 39-60.

Will, George F. "The Legacy of the Sixties," *American Heritage* (October 1996): 54-60.

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