

Reagan: A Memoir

by

W. B. Allen

Governor Reagan – that’s how we referred to him for the fourteen years before he became President – made us one with him from the beginning. The highest moment of my personal appreciation arrived on election night in 1966. It was not merely personal, however, for in that moment I imbibed confidence in the renewal of the American commitment to self-government and the defeat of Soviet tyranny – making the world safe for self-government once again. Reagan’s greatness lay in the greatness of the task he set for himself and for America and the gifts given him by God that enabled him to complete the task. His entry onto the political stage crystallized and rendered coherent the purpose of national politics in a local theater. The statesmanship that initiated recovery from welfare-state dependency, revived our economic prosperity, and faced down communism – Reagan tore down the Iron Curtain even more certainly than Gorbachev tore down the Berlin Wall – consisted more in bringing Americans to think better of themselves.

Of very many examples, one remains dearest to me. In 1977, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of ISI (Intercollegiate Studies Institute), he delivered an address widely reported in the press as Reagan’s attempt to gain the center of American politics by moving to embrace affirmative action within the conservative movement. The idea was nothing less than a surrender to the Eastern establishment of the Republican Party. Unbelieving and moved with alarm, I wrote to him seeking an explanation. He responded at length in one of his famous hand-written letters, pointing out where the media had gotten things wrong and re-committing to the idea of a color-blind America. My confidence was restored in the vision of the statesman who, a year earlier, had asked us all to imagine ourselves leaving a time-capsule for a later generation that, upon opening it, could recognize in us a people that loved liberty as much as they did – which could happen only if we left them that liberty to love. There was the Reagan I had known in 1966, and upon whose election I was moved, in company with his daughter, Maureen – contemplating the victory we had gained in the gubernatorial election – to exclaim with joy, “We have saved America!” That is Ronald Reagan’s legacy: he led us to save America.