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The Pragmatic Idealist: An Exposition and Review of *Alan Cranston – Senator from California: Making a “Dent in the World”* by Judith Robinson, Telegraph Hill Press, 2012

Abstract: Alan Cranston, former Senator from California, achieved so much in his life that an equally prodigious biography is required to present his story to the world. In *Alan Cranston – Senator from California*, historian Judith Robinson seizes the opportunity to write an incredibly detailed, thoughtful memoir about a person who lived through, and participated in, some of the most important events of the twentieth century. The purpose of this book review is to highlight the key components of Robinson’s exhaustive biography, which in doing so, will explicate the themes, characters, and key events that compose the story of Cranston’s life. This takes shape by engaging the book as it chronicles Cranston’s life from his creative adolescence, to his early adulthood exploring much of the world as a foreign correspondent, and finally, his over half-century as a key figure in California politics. By utilizing Cranston’s personal papers, letters to friends and colleagues, interviews with key figures in his life, and media coverage of important historical and political events, the review will demonstrate Robinson’s dedication to telling the story of Alan Cranston in rich detail, with many revelatory anecdotes to pique the reader’s interest. Taken as a whole, the biography is an essential read in explaining the significance of Cranston’s life in the larger context of political and social change in California, national legislative and electoral politics during the Cold War, and the work to build closer bonds between the political entities that represent the people of the world.

Keywords: Alan Cranston; US Senate; California politics; California Democratic Council; Democratic party.

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Over the course of the twentieth century, California embarked on a transitional journey from a demographically homogenous, Republican stronghold, to a multi-ethnic liberal beacon. Few political figures in California history embody the state’s

cultural and political metamorphosis as aptly as former Democratic Senator Alan MacGregor Cranston (1914–2000). Cranston served as California State Controller from 1959 to 1967 and in the US Senate from 1969 to 1993, where he showed he was a gifted politician who spent his life understanding the pivotal questions of the world and his times. An avowed liberal Democrat, Cranston spent his life fighting against ethnic and racial discrimination, advocating for a representative and responsive form of affirmative government, maximizing employment, and contributing to the public knowledge and policymaking process of many issues, especially nuclear disarmament and world peace. However, a politician tasked with representing as many diverse interest groups as exist in California could hardly be successful without holding numerous interests in mind, and Cranston's greatest gift was his pragmatism, which allowed him to collaborate in a bipartisan fashion to achieve gains in almost every sector of California's economy and society.

In *Alan Cranston – Senator from California*, historian Judith Robinson valiantly chronicles the life of one of the state's most accomplished leaders and the pivotal times in which he lived. Robinson is truly impressive in her aggregation of information from interviews, letters, diary entries, debates, and media coverage, which she ably synthesizes into an ingratiating character portrait. At over 800 pages (plus 200 pages of notes) divided into two volumes – the first addressing Cranston's life until his failed first attempt to join the Senate in 1964, the second covering his Senate career – Robinson's biography leaves no stone unturned in narrating the awe-inspiring life of a man who seemingly did everything he ever set out to do. The book reads like a first-person memoir as Robinson allows copious amounts of direct quotes to tell the bulk of the story. In her quest to tell the saga of the California liberal, Robinson seeks to contextualize the era Cranston operated within and how the problems he grappled with were forward thinking enough to persist to this day.

This review intends to inform the reader of Robinson's research methods and organizational structure, in conjunction with an exposition of the key events covered in the book. Robinson's work contributes to a deeper understanding of external topics as well, such as California history, political campaign literature, statewide political governance, changes in the state's profile, twentieth century political issues, and national legislative politics. The review will engage the material on several overarching themes, including political philosophy, Cranston's interaction with popular political figures, the role of family, and campaign activity.

Robinson's narrative begins with a plentiful exposition of Alan Cranston's family genealogy and childhood development. Born to a moderate Republican family in the Peninsula region of the San Francisco Bay area, Cranston's idyllic,

carefree upbringing lent itself to personal discovery and fostered creativity (I: 7).¹ Robinson cites several examples of his early awareness of racial issues, which can be seen in his abundance of satirical cartoons that touch on the prevailing views on race during the 1920s (I: 11–12). The ensuing chapters show the development of Cranston's philosophy of internationalist humanism, which Robinson shows materialized through a prison visit to meet Tom Mooney, intellectual discussions with peers at Stanford, and touring Europe during the early stages of the rise of fascism in the 1930s (I: 25, 53, 62).

Robinson synthesizes scores of diary entries, letters, and publications in explaining his riveting experiences in Germany, Mexico, and Italy on the heels of the Second World War. As a foreign correspondent eager to capture a good story, Cranston chronicled and analyzed Hitler's implementation of a prejudicial police state in Germany, which he would warn Americans about in an unauthorized translation of *Mein Kampf* (which garnered a lawsuit from Hitler's American publisher) (I: 67–68, 123). Robinson describes Cranston's break from Stanford, in which he and a friend sojourn to Mexico, only to observe a militia campaign to expel Tabasco Governor Tomas Garrido Canabal, whom Cranston described as a "Fanatical, atheistical [sic], cruel, cowardly" dictator (I: 72). The "revolution" ended with a great anticlimax, as the Governor was deposed before Cranston and the militia reached their destination (I: 78). Cranston soon found himself working for the International News Service in Rome, where he learned how uncompromising Mussolini's domestic program was and how nationalist fervor allowed for destruction and death, as he had witnessed in a military sponsored trip to Ethiopia (I: 99–110).

When Cranston, wiser to the troubles of the world, returned to the US, he took up advocacy positions on behalf of several key causes. As a lobbyist for, and later president of, Common Council for American Unity, Cranston got his first taste of legislative politics by seeking out members on Capitol Hill to support or alter immigration legislation. Robinson showcases Cranston's ability to work with members of all political persuasions to make practical changes to government policies affecting disenfranchised groups in society (I: 130, 136).

Continuing his work to better government's role in treating people of all ethnic and geographic origins equally under the law, Cranston joined the Office of War Information during the Franklin Roosevelt administration. In this position, he performed exceedingly well in countering fascist propaganda abroad

¹ All parenthetical citations are for the book in review. The Roman numeral preceding the page number corresponds to the volume number, e.g. (I: 7) for volume 1 page 7. This review is very heavy on citations, primarily to allow the prospective reader to easily find the sections highlighted herein.

and elevating the foreign view of America by strategically reaching out to local populations of Japanese, Mexican, German, and Italian Americans.² His work proved highly successful at promoting a collective, inclusive American identity and decreasing civilian resistance to the US in Italy, which Robinson describes in meticulous contextual detail (I: 144–162).

As the Second World War commenced, Cranston attempted to join the Army as an officer as part of the effort to thwart global fascism. However, Cranston was denied such a post because of internal concerns that he was a communist, which stemmed largely from his time with O.W.I. and Common Council (I: 178). Throughout the book, Robinson adroitly explains how Cranston's professional associations and his belief that government should treat all citizens equally made him a target of opportunistic, red-baiting politicians and had a deleterious effect on his professional and political career.

The advent of the atomic bomb greatly affected Cranston and led to his advocacy for a powerful world government in letters to colleagues, his work on a historical narrative about the League of Nations ratification debate entitled *The Killing of the Peace*, and to writing an unpublished play entitled "The Bomb" about an impending doomsday (I: 184).³ Conveying a pivotal moment in his developing internationalism, Robinson explains Cranston's role in promoting amendments to the United Nations charter by participating in the Dublin Conference. This phase of Cranston's life put him on the front line of understanding the impediments to resolving issues of sovereignty and international coordination that would become a major lifelong concern (I: 204).

After touring the globe to promote international collaboration on nuclear confinement, Cranston returned to California to lobby the state government to pass a pro-world government bill, which it did in a bipartisan vote in 1949 (I: 249). Robinson cites a *San Francisco Chronicle* article to convey Cranston's novel argument that world government will lower taxes, since much of the US government's budget is devoted to policing the world, which a well-resourced world

² Robinson addresses an especially captivating story where Cranston worked to lessen racial tensions in Los Angeles between zoot-suited Angelinos, ornery sailors, and unethical police officers. The vignette speaks to the larger issues of racially motivated violence and economic inequity in Los Angeles as the city transitioned to a multicultural economic engine. Cranston organized a blood drive where Mexican-Americans donated blood to show their patriotism and encouraged the hiring of racial minorities in "war industries" (I: 168).

³ See Cranston 1945. *The Killing of the Peace*. New York: Viking Press. The book vividly captures in great detail the schism between Woodrow Wilson's pro-ratification supporters, and Henry Cabot Lodge's isolationist faction. As Robinson points out, quote attribution is a clear problem of the work, but its general accuracy, and compelling situations, show Cranston could have had a successful career as a historian.

government would assume responsibility for, thus reducing Americans' tax burden (I: 254). Cranston then directed his experience in advocacy and organizing to found the California Democratic Council (CDC), which would connect progressive community activists with party activities, promote liberal candidates, and encourage a progressive legislative agenda (I: 293). The CDC would become instrumental in increasing the influence of racial minorities and community activists in the California Democratic Party and serve as a springboard for Cranston to seek statewide office (I: 315).

In 1958, Cranston successfully ran for State Controller in large part because of the community groundwork he established with the CDC and his pragmatism at garnering conservative and business support (I: 330). In office, Cranston's unique governing style materialized as progressive on civil rights issues (naming Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and the state's first female inheritance-tax appraisers) and the environment, while a moderate on fiscal issues who supported a balanced budget and tax cuts (I: 338, 345). One very interesting dynamic Robinson examines is the tension between Cranston's good government ideals and his need to appoint tax collectors, which he reluctantly filled with people who campaigned for him or worked closely with the party. Robinson shows how Cranston admirably fulfilled his role in two terms as Controller, even though while his patronage appointments left a lasting blemish on his record (I: 405).

In 1968, Cranston achieved one of his lifelong aspirations by achieving election to the US Senate where he became a liberal leader known for working towards pragmatic, bipartisan solutions and an accurate vote counter who knew where each senator stood on any given issue. Cranston served in the Senate for 24 years and as party whip for a record 14 years, paving the way for future California Democrats to gain leadership posts (II: 318, 148). He was known to have an incredible ability to accurately count and obtain key votes on crucial issues. One source claimed his support on a bill amounted to "ten or twelve extra votes" (II: 131). Using press reports, interviews, letters, and Cranston's reflections, Robinson does an exceptional job of showing how widespread Cranston's influence was in the Senate.

In explaining Cranston's ideology, Robinson quotes longtime aide Pam Duffy, "He was a very liberal California Democrat in an era of moderate Republicans, and a big believer in the Great Society – but also a great compromiser" (II: 53). In a television interview, Cranston described himself as "conservative in fiscal matters but liberal in human matters" (II: 58). Through the course of the book, Robinson shows Cranston's "balancing act" between supporting liberal causes and business interests (II: 108). An important aspect of Cranston's legislative character was his concerted effort to work on at least one issue with every member of the Senate, claiming to achieve this end with only the exception of Senator Tower

of Texas (II: 60). Robinson uncovers a gem in how Cranston decided priorities, proceeding first according to moral principles, second, the needs of California and the nation, third, his political philosophy, and finally, his personal relationships with advocating members (II: 109). If Cranston was not always successful at passing legislation, which he often was, he had an incredible impact on placing important issues in the stream of public consciousness, almost all of which were eventually enacted into law.⁴

One of the most stunning aspects of the book is how Robinson encapsulates the sheer breadth of issues that Cranston had his fingerprints on. In his first term, Cranston worked on bills to further the desegregation of schools, protect wildlife, increase voter registration, and end nuclear testing (II: 61). He joined Massachusetts Republican Edward Brooke in passing the first amendment mandating the end of the war in Vietnam (II: 111). Noting the Executive branch's information advantage, Cranston proposed improving Congresses' ability to independently research issues, which materialized in the Legislative Reorganization Act (II: 63). Though Cranston opposed undemocratic regimes, he believed the US should engage in diplomatic relations with all countries, which led him to steer to passage a bill to acknowledge the People's Republic of China (II: 67).

Throughout the course of his prolific time in the Senate, he seemed to participate in every possible policy field. Cranston maintained public and legislative support on issues of fairness under the law, as in the Equal Rights Amendment, and accommodations for vulnerable populations, including the disabled, elderly, poor, and veterans (II: 135, 378, 81). With Ted Kennedy, he supported a national health insurance program (II: 83). When conservatives began emphasizing Supreme Court nominations as a component to achieving their political and policy objectives, Cranston took a prominent role in opposing nominees he deemed unfit for duty under the Nixon (Haynsworth, Carswell) and Reagan (Bork) administrations (II: 84, 311). He advocated for institutional reform to make the Senate more functional by reducing the vote threshold to invoke cloture on filibusters from 67 to 60 (II: 105). A former reporter, he prominently supported the freedom of the press to protect the identity of their sources (II: 121). Cranston's moral compass often found him opposed to US imperialism, which led him to favor transferring control of the Panama Canal to Panama (II: 161). In his last years in the Senate, Cranston focused heavily on expanding the public's access to

⁴ Two examples of issues that Cranston advocated for, but were completed after his tenure in office, were the redesigning of circulating coins (including commemorative state quarters), seen as an exceptionally successful program, and the ratification of the new START treaty in 2011 (II: 368, 402).

affordable housing (II: 373). Many of the issues he addressed still face the nation today — a testament to Cranston's foresight.

One of his clearest strengths was in promoting the needs and values of California in federal policy, even when it conflicted with his ideology. Robinson conveys Cranston's lifelong opposition to the parasitic effect the military industrial complex had on the national budget, but when California defense contractor Lockheed needed a loan guarantee, he ensured the bill passed by two votes (II: 101). After the oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, Cranston led the fight for a moratorium on drilling in the region (II: 92). With longtime political collaborator, if not friend, Congressman Phil Burton, Cranston steered to passage a vast expansion of the national park system (II: 94). He supported farm workers and had a strong relationship with Caesar Chavez, which he balanced by supporting subsidies that farm owners favored (II: 115). He ardently supported earthquake mitigation legislation, the film industry, savings and loan associations, and the wine industry (II: 98, 173, 117). Robinson demonstrates how Cranston embodied the median voter in California: liberal on social issues, encouraging of diversity, and understanding of the manner in which government and the private sector can work together to spur economic growth. Cranston epitomized the model legislator, holding the interests of every constituent, while working in a bipartisan manner to fix the problems his state and nation faced.

In the lead up to the 1984 election, Cranston sought to fulfill another lifelong aspiration and run for president. He ran a single-issue campaign based on promoting world peace through cooperation with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to achieve nuclear disarmament (II: 220). After initially winning several straw polls (including California), Cranston's campaign took key hits when the USSR shot down a South Korean passenger plane and several powerful California Democrats endorsed his leading opponent Walter Mondale (II: 242). A poor showing in the Iowa caucuses doomed the campaign, and Cranston dropped out of the race (II: 248, 250). Though the campaign was quite mercurial, and ended with infighting and accusations of fraud, Cranston's advocacy for nuclear disarmament and world peace proved successful in agenda setting, as it pushed his primary opponents to address the issue (II: 224). Although Cranston was disappointed with President Reagan's defeat of the Democratic nominee, he was heartened when his longtime foe claimed nuclear disarmament would be a goal of his second term (II: 258).

Cranston's senatorial career ended amid tumult, in part due to a diagnosis of cancer in his prostate, but largely because of what became known as the Keating Five scandal. In a chapter entitled "*A real Greek tragedy*," Robinson situates the affair within the larger savings and loan scandals of the 1980s, which required federal intervention to prevent mass losses to the public (II: 328). Cranston was

implicated in the situation by asking Federal Home Loan Bank Board Chairman Edwin Gray to speed up an investigation of one of Charles Keating's S&L associations, along with four other senators.

Robinson objectively examines the ordeal, including unflattering letters between Cranston and Gray (II: 326). An Ethics Committee investigation alleged the senators engaged in a quid pro quo scheme. Where other senators implicated received actual gifts from Keating, such as airplane rides, Cranston used donations from Keating to fund voter registration efforts in California (II: 338). In his moment of vulnerability, Cranston was disheartened when people who benefited from his party building efforts, including Nancy Pelosi and Barbara Boxer, were among the first to ask him to retire (II: 343).

Cranston ended up being the scapegoat for the entire ordeal (he hypothesized because he announced he would not seek reelection, while the others faced upcoming elections), and the other senators received lighter punishments (Cranston received a reprimand) (II: 347). The eternal idealist, Cranston took the opportunity to advocate for public financing of elections, something he previously supported, to alleviate such appearances on impropriety (II: 354). Robinson concludes that his defiant handling of the accusations, paired with the larger implications of the ordeal, cast "a shadow over his lifetime reputation as a champion of progressive causes and beneficial programs" (II: 355). This dramatic chapter shows the painstaking undoing of a man, while exposing in factual terms how hypocritical the punishment was for behavior that was ubiquitous in contemporary politics.

Cranston's retirement period hardly resembled that of most retirees. He maintained a focus on the nuclear issue, as chair of the State of the World Forum and president of the Global Security Institute (II: 388, 402). To conclude his life's work, he wrote a treatise on how to redefine the idea of sovereignty, later published as *The Sovereignty Revolution* (II: 407). Robinson concludes the book with a quote of what Cranston wanted on his tombstone: "He worked for peace."

There are many reasons to read this book, none greater than the riveting character study it offers. Robinson's use of primary sources to sketch Cranston's development through his varying hobbies, activities, residences, friendships, vocations, ambitions, and views, leaves the reader with an intimate understanding of this influential public figure. Cranston was a world traveler who believed immersing himself in different cultures would breed a better understanding of himself, and the world. Robinson describes Cranston as an eternal optimist and quotes his longtime aide Murray Flander as saying Cranston believed "if you don't win today, you'll win tomorrow" (II: 54). But Cranston was also an enigma – he was phenomenal at raising money, but hated to schmooze with donors during

fundraisers (II: 138). Despite his low key, modest temperament, he had big ideas of international cooperation amid constant conflict (II: 145). He was a contemplative man, and when he decided to change his position on an issue, he did so slowly, and without excuse (II: 191).

One of the most gratifying aspects of the book is Robinson's treatment of the people Cranston encountered throughout his life. As with her other works, namely *The Hearsts: An American Dynasty* (1991) and "You're in Your Mother's Arms:" *The Life and Legacy of Phil Burton* (1994), Robinson emphasizes the role of family in instilling values and providing support for her subject's goals and decisions. Cranston's family informed his sense of dedication to others, and strongly encouraged and bolstered the decisions he made in life. In fostering decision-making skills in their son, William and Carol Cranston would "advise" young Alan of the best course of action, but allow him to make his own decisions, "[on] the theory that you learn best from experience and that practice would develop resourcefulness" (I: 9). In one important vignette, Robinson describes Cranston overhearing a conversation between his parents, in which William expressed doubts in Alan's ability to be president, which Robinson theorized left Cranston with "resentment at his father's dismissing the idea," and may have ultimately led him to run for president (I: 24). Carol was supportive of her son's decision to seek office, eventually even changing her party identification to Democrat to support her son (but only after he husband, an avowed Republican, had passed away) (I: 312, 286).

The family Alan Cranston assembled was equally instrumental in fulfilling his political ambitions. He and his first wife Geneva were able to work on issues affecting immigrant rights at Common Council, having both served as president at different points (I: 290). Cranston's sister Eleanor remained a constant supporter, helping build the state's Democratic party as chair of the California Democratic Women's committee, writing the first biography of Alan in 1980, and loaning his presidential campaign \$25,000 (I: 337, 242).⁵ His eldest son Robin campaigned with his father as president of the Young Democrats, and his tragic death in 1980 forever changed Alan (I: 177). His youngest son Kim also campaigned with him and would carry out his father's legacy by leading voter registration projects, advocating for world peace, and following Cranston's death, by assembling and

⁵ See Fowle 1980. *Cranston: Senator from California*. San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press. The key differences between versions are Fowle's has a more intimate feel to it, with several unique stories that did not reappear in Robinson's version. Furthermore, Robinson interviewed Fowle, which allowed the version under review to benefit from further insights that might not have been included in Fowle's version.

publishing Alan's manuscript as *The Sovereignty Revolution* (II: 410).⁶ Robinson shows Cranston was surrounded by goodhearted people who cared deeply about the work he dedicated his life to.

Another interesting component of the book is the exposition of Cranston's views of important historical figures. It must have been interesting for Robinson to examine Cranston's views of William Randolph Hearst, whom she had previously written about in a comprehensive family history. Cranston, Robinson writes, "derided" Hearst for his sensationalist publications and anti-communist, anti-League of Nations politics (I: 93, 193). She explains one segment of Cranston's life when he experienced cognitive dissonance working for part of the vast Hearst publication network, which he accused of manipulating the minds of its readers without their knowledge (I: 101). Cranston resented Hearst's view that Mussolini was a "great man," and that Hearst directed his editors to remove critical stories of the fascist regime (I: 102). Later in life, Cranston objected to the Hearst media spreading racist news stories about Mexican Americans (I: 167). It is interesting that some of Hearst's unflattering qualities that come up in this book are absent from Robinson's treatment of the Hearst family.

Also noteworthy are Cranston's interactions with fellow California Democrats, Governor Pat Brown and Assembly Speaker Jesse "Big Daddy" Unruh, as the three officials essentially dictated the party's policies in the 1960s. Cranston and Brown formed a powerful liberal bloc within the party, while Unruh and Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty led the moderate to conservative faction (II: 10). Brown and Cranston were not friends, but were very good political allies. Robinson notes that Brown often lent campaign staff to Cranston to help with fundraising and strategy, and Cranston served as Brown's leading advocate among elected officials. In one touching sign of their collaboration, Robinson explains how Cranston transferred scarce campaign funds from his 1966 State Controller reelection campaign to Brown's gubernatorial reelection campaign against Ronald Reagan; both Democrats lost their elections. Robinson quotes Brown's campaign manager Don Bradley saying it was "the most purely unselfish political act I've ever seen" (II: 9).

Cranston had a turbulent relationship with Jesse Unruh who, as a consummate machine politician who frowned on volunteers and community activists,

⁶ See Cranston 2004. *The Sovereignty Revolution*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press. Cranston died before the book was completed, but Kim brought together the existing manuscripts and included contributions from Mikhail Gorbachev and Jane Goodall. Though the book is very short, Cranston lays out a concise argument for how sovereignty can be redefined as a precept, and how democratic institutions can actually gain sovereignty (i.e., control over issues that affect their citizens but heretofore have been unable to address) by joining a powerful world government.

was threatened by the CDC and the progressive agenda in California politics. Robinson traces their legislative battle over patronage in which Unruh tried to eliminate Cranston's ability to appoint ITAs (I: 344). The two resented each other greatly throughout Cranston's time in state politics, but when Cranston decided to run for Senate in 1968, he sought to bury the hatchet and give Unruh the first shot at taking on entrenched Senator Thomas Keuchel. Unruh declined, and in a show of appreciation, gave Cranston a poll showing he would beat Yorty in a primary (II: 19). Robinson's detailed explanation of the relationship between the three prominent Democrats is highly engaging, and provides a window into the behind the scenes political dynamics during the state's developmental renaissance.

Cranston had an acrimonious relationship with the two presidents California produced during the Cold War, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Nixon comes across as comical at times with his excessive paranoia, ruthless electioneering, and red-baiting.⁷ Cranston resented Nixon's tactics and fear mongering – as Robinson puts it, “[Cranston] maintained an almost visceral life-long dislike and distrust of Nixon” (II: 98). Robinson uncovers a hilarious anecdote in which Cranston and Nixon run into each other at an event, and during their exchange, Nixon pokes Cranston with his finger, leading Cranston to recall, “I felt as though I had been stabbed” (I: 356).

Cranston wrote a letter to Nixon asking him to appoint former Republican Senator Kuchel to an administration position, which never occurred, showing Cranston's lack of clout with his fellow Californian (II: 44). Later in Nixon's presidency, Cranston was among the first to call on Nixon to resign amid mounting accusations of illegal activity orchestrated within the White House (II: 129). But when both politicians were in their twilight years, they exchanged kind letters, and Robinson excerpts a very sober letter in which Nixon shows appreciation for Cranston's foreign policy leadership (II: 375).

Cranston's relationship with Reagan was not much better than with Nixon. In the campaign following Nixon's attempt at governor, Cranston found a new antagonist in Reagan, who he claimed stood for, “Fear, extremism, and escapism” (II: 5). Cranston believed Reagan campaigned in bad faith, claiming to be a moderate when he was in fact an ultra-conservative, and that his “lack of conviction will not stand the test of time” (II: 5). He said Reagan “resorts to force, not grudgingly and with sorrow, but almost with a flush of elation” (II: 251). At one

⁷ Robinson's wonderful ability to contextualize events with direct quotes serves well to display Nixon's erratic, rampant anti-communist campaign tactics, which contrast greatly, and with some irony, with his leading foreign policy achievement as president – the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China.

point, Robinson quotes Cranston saying Reagan in the White House would be “chilling” (II: 97).

Once Reagan occupied the presidency, Cranston claimed to enter the presidential race primarily to prevent Reagan from being reelected (II: 209). But such a political rivalry was not without human moments, and Robinson captures what Cranston claimed was the only conversation he ever had with Reagan, in which the two discussed workout techniques (II: 296). Though they differed greatly on policy preferences, the two ultimately worked toward the same goal of nuclear disarmament.

Cranston also had conflicted relationships with the senators he served California with, ranging from filial to strained. When Cranston entered the Senate, he paired with conservative Republican George Murphy, and Robinson notes many the state interests had to appeal to Cranston for relief because Murphy was unresponsive. Cranston would serve as a mentor to Murphy’s successor, Democrat John Tunney, who Cranston often assisted by whipping votes for Tunney’s bills, even when it strained relations with other colleagues. When Sam Hayakawa joined the Senate, the two were considered the odd couple of state delegations, as they did not speak much and often canceled each others’ votes (II: 162). When Republican Pete Wilson arrived in the Senate, he and Cranston differed on environmental policy, but aligned on fiscal matters more often than many heterogeneous state delegations (II: 370). Robinson convincingly demonstrates that Cranston had the ability to work with just about anyone on just about anything, regardless of temperament or ideology.

One of the truly magnificent and exciting components of Robinson’s work is how she encapsulates the components of political campaigning, and the exuberance that comes with the endeavor. Robinson captures Cranston’s campaign style wonderfully, including his anachronistic emphasis on economic arguments in promoting liberal policies in the 1960s, to his use of humanistic arguments in the age of Reaganomics in the 1980s. Cranston concocted campaign platforms with vigor and creativity, often being able to appeal to political constituencies that were at odds with one another, such as businesses and labor, industrialists and environmentalists. He maintained Republican voter support across the state, receiving the votes of one third of Reagan’s supporters in 1980 (II: 196).

Cranston cultivated strong ties across regions and set records for counties won and the largest (at the time) electoral margin in a single election (II: 135, 142). Robinson also shows that, without fail, all seven times he made it to a general election he was a victim of red-baiting, usually in the form of the same tired accusations for three and a half decades (II: 298). When he ran for president, the chief problem he encountered was his appearance, as his campaign handlers were worried his bald, older than his age appearance would hurt his election prospects

(II: 223). Robinson fills the book with contextual additions, such as polls, media interpretations, debates, and interviews with campaign staff to give the reader an inside understanding of the what it was like to campaign across California in the second half of the twentieth century.

In conclusion, Judith Robinson has created the preeminent work on Alan Cranston's life and a fascinating and informative read. She deftly demonstrates how Cranston personified the times in which he lived, with a spirit of idealistic fervor to overcome the mounting problems of post-industrial modernity. The work situates Cranston as a leading figure in the state's transition from leaning Republican, to staunchly Democratic.

At the same time, Robinson conveys his dedication to politics and attaining his goals, while also showing how his passion often led to controversy, such as republishing *Mein Kampf* and his role in the Keating Five. With his optimism, Cranston always held a deep sense of duty to bringing his vision of a better world to bear, primarily by increasing understanding between social groups, using government as a vessel to achieve attainable goals, and the cultivation of cooperation between political entities. Robinson masterfully incorporates Cranston's experiences into a larger narrative of the complex times in which he lived. This book is far more than a biography, as fans of character studies, history buffs, political enthusiasts, and world travelers will all find vignettes of interest. Robinson's dedication to compiling all available sources of information about Cranston's experiences, and her ability to synthesize the material into an epic story of one man's adventure through the twentieth century world, is worthy of celebration and praise.

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