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Book Review: Earl Warren: A Public Life, by G. Edward White

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nobbed with President Harry S. Truman, Adlai Stevenson, and John Sparkman—not to mention Billy Graham, Billy Sol Estes, and others of national note. He delivered the keynote address at the Democratic Convention of 1956, where he appeared in the role of a Bible-toting and hymn-quoting young orator. He was widely criticized for his closeness to his father—a small-town politician who, according to political enemies, “influence pedalled from one end of the state to the other.” Indeed, the author mistakenly identifies F. L. Browning (Governor Browning’s brother) as Browning’s father, as he attempts to show that other political leaders of the state also have relied upon fatherly advice.

With few exceptions, Tennessee voters have not elected men of outstanding ability as chief executive, but as governors go, Clement would rank near the top. He was an able administrator and was basically honest; he displayed sound judgment on issues of civil rights and reapportionment and warm compassion where underprivileged people were concerned. As a regional and national figure, his influence surpassed that of most of the other governors of the day.

The author devotes only a few pages to Clement’s early and private life. One might wish that some of the political commentary—the entire chapter, for example, on the Ralston Schoolfield impeachment trial in which Clement took no part—had given way to more information about his personal life and its connection with his political utterances and activities. The work is well documented, but the system of footnoting—a surprisingly innovative fiasco—renders the copious notes practically useless. Nevertheless, this warm and eloquent portrayal of a regional leader at midcentury contributes to our understanding of politics of the 1950s and should not go overlooked by students of political history of the South.

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ROBERT E. CORLEW

Earl Warren: A Public Life. By G. Edward White. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. x + 429 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, and index. \$25.00.)

Earl Warren’s sixteen years as chief justice of the Supreme Court justifiably dominate G. Edward White’s thoughtful and sympathetic biography, filling two-thirds of the text and establishing the perspective that informs the whole. White addresses himself to the classic question: how did the determined law enforcement officer, the states-rights Republican politician, and the racist advocate of Japanese relocation become the “Chief,” in fact as well as form, of the centralizing, libertarian, and egalitarian Court that bears his name. Although White charts the changes that Warren underwent, he argues that his years on the Court were fundamentally consistent with his earlier career. Warren’s values were rooted in a frugal, working-class background and in the California progressivism that flowered with the ascendancy of Hiram Johnson. Throughout his career he exhibited a confident faith in his own intuitive ethical judgments and a single-minded determination in carrying them into effect. Finally, his forceful style of administrative leadership grew from and flourished in a series of executive positions that culminated, rather than terminated, in the office of chief justice.

Warren was one of the great chief justices, White maintains, "because of the intangible but undeniable impact of his presence on the Court." The statement is undoubtedly true. Unfortunately Warren's "presence" also has an impact on the book. An ex-law clerk and fervent admirer of the chief justice, White too readily accepts Warren's views at face value, agreeing, for example, with Warren's claims that he did not harbor strong political ambitions or carefully calculate his steady political rise. Warren, in fact, strove to protect his public image. He demanded total loyalty from his staff, pruned his papers carefully, and left only a bland and external testimony in his autobiography and oral recollections. The paucity of revealing personal records, which White readily acknowledges, prevents a detailed analysis of the ways in which Warren's "presence" guided the Court.

The book, however, is not wholly uncritical. White suggests a darker side to the chief justice, a man possessed of "a well-developed capacity to hate." He focuses, too, on Warren's vulnerabilities as a judge, from his selective applications of the first and fifth amendments to his failure to generate any rationally coherent theory of constitutional adjudication. The author probes Warren's jurisprudence to its core values, defending it in social and historical terms but pronouncing it inadequate in terms of professional craft values.

Earl Warren is solid, informative, and perceptive. It provides an excellent introduction to a major figure in twentieth-century American history.

NEW YORK CITY

EDWARD A. PURCELL, JR.

Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. By Stephen B. Oates. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982. xiv + 560 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$19.95.)

Stephen B. Oates has clearly succeeded in writing the kind of biography he intended. Rejecting abstract analysis—"an author-dominated lecture"—in favor of "literature which conveys the warmth and immediacy of a life being lived," he has written a vivid, emotionally engrossing account of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life. Oates carefully, though not always subtly, embeds his interpretation in a portrait that reveals the contrasting facets of King's character. Oates's King is first of all a preacher with deep roots in the emotion-filled, male-dominated world of the southern black church, a world where King's sense of divinely inspired mission and his charismatic leadership style were born. Yet King is also portrayed as a scholar seeking an intellectually consistent philosophy of life and an activist firmly attached to a set of coherent, yet eclectic, radical beliefs.

Rather than depicting King merely as a well-meaning advocate of racial brotherhood with an ardent faith in the effectiveness of nonviolent reform tactics, Oates shows that King was willing to provoke racist violence in order to force federal intervention and to challenge liberal leaders even while seeking their support. King is revealed as a persistent critic of capitalism and Western imperialism who resisted President John F. Kennedy's request that he end his relationship with an adviser accused of being a Communist and who angered President Lyndon B. Johnson through militant public statements against American intervention in Vietnam. Like Oates's previous works on John