

2016 Ros Davies Memorial Travel Award Report by Dominic Barker, University of Oxford

Firstly, I would like to thank Professor Philip Davies for his generosity in funding the Ros Davies Memorial Travel Award. The award allowed me to conduct two weeks research at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and a week at the Bancroft Library, which is part of the University of California Berkeley, throughout June 2017.

My doctoral thesis seeks to challenge the notion that Reagan was a simple actor who fell into politics, by suggesting that he was driven by his ideas. Reagan's ideological core, I would contend, was grounded in classical liberal thought and Reagan was actually a non-intellectual intellectual – not necessarily an academic articulator of ideas, but his strongly held personal beliefs and his ideas were deeply felt. I suggest that this ideological core was solidified as a result of growth of government through the New Deal, and the fear of centralised tyrannical government which had consumed Europe in World War Two. Furthermore, this core became entrenched and consequently, Reagan's political opinions changed very little from the 1950s to the end of his presidency in 1989. I wish to apply this new consideration of Reagan to examine how conservatives tackled racial politics, amid the rapidly changing picture of the Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of affirmative action, in the mid-twentieth century to address the rise of colour-blind conservatism.

The purpose of the trip was to investigate events which led to Ronald Reagan's rise to the governorship of California in 1966, where he defeated two-time incumbent Pat Brown, and Reagan's conduct in office from 1967-75. Whilst at the Reagan Library, I examined thousands of pages of letters, memos and speeches which had been authored by Reagan during the 1960s and 70s. It is in the speeches, that I could find Reagan's ideological musings on the role and size of government which will be of greatest importance to my project. Furthermore, I was granted access to some of Reagan's private papers, a privilege which has been reserved for noted Reagan scholars such as Lou Cannon and Edmund Morris. I examined a collection of essays Reagan wrote during his college years (the earliest known material authored by Reagan) which should provide valuable insight into the formation of Reagan's ideological core. Similarly at Berkeley, going through the papers of Governor Pat Brown, I gained a real understanding for how events such as the Watts Riots of 1965, fundamentally altered Californian, and ultimately national politics, by galvanising a grassroots movement on the right as described in Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors*.

Ultimately, I believe that this trip was successful in providing valuable material for my consideration of Reagan's ideological core, and for how the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement shaped Reagan's broader politics. I once again would like to thank the APG and Professor Davies for their support, and I look forward to discussing this project at future APG events.



Photos

Top photo – Dom at the entrance to the Reagan Library

Bottom Left – View from the Library down Simi Valley to the Pacific Ocean

Bottom Right – Sather Tower at the heart of UC Berkeley