

***Clifford Case and the Challenge of Liberal Republicanism*****William R. Fernekes****Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023****461 pages****ISBN: 9781666928587****DOI: 10.14713/njs.v10i2.370**

William R. Fernekes begins this meticulous and timely biography of US senator from New Jersey Clifford Case with a question: “Who was Clifford Case and what is meant by a liberal Republican?” The author’s answer to that question provides a great service to readers who are well versed in 20th-century United States politics, scholars of the modern conservative movement, observers of today’s dysfunction-ridden Congress who don’t remember post–World War II era consensus politics, and everyone in between. Senator Case is revealed to be a dedicated and independent public servant who put principle over partisanship as he sought to deploy the government to improve people’s lives.

The span of Case’s life and legacy are covered chronologically in 20 chapters that trace Case’s political career from his first electoral office as a member of the Rahway Municipal Council, to his 10 years in the House of Representatives, and his 24 years as a US senator. Fernekes draws on Case’s public statements and senatorial papers; author interviews with his family, staff, and contemporaries such as Thomas H. Kean; and local and national newspapers among other primary sources to write the first scholarly biography of Clifford Case. To support Fernekes’s argument that Case was a conscientious public servant who cared deeply about deliberation, the book features passages from Case’s speeches and statements in the Congressional Record. The result is a detail-rich text that provides insight into the senator’s reasoning, evolution in thinking, and commitments, particularly as his support for high-profile issues such as the Taft-Hartley Act and the Vietnam War waned. Case is proven to be a politician

who did not demure from breaking with his party even when it brought him scorn from Republicans as high up as the president.

Fernekes begins *Clifford Case and the Challenge of Liberal Republicanism* with Case's first statement on the House floor, a refutation of segregationist Mississippi representative John Rankin's attacks on Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter and African American veterans in 1945. Case went on to become a steadfast supporter of federal civil rights legislation, which he argued was necessary because local and state governments had proven themselves unable or unwilling to provide equal protections to African Americans. Case's advocacy for civil and human rights became a central component of his career, in addition to his calls for congressional ethics and financial disclosure rules dating back to 1958. Of equal importance was Case's sustained effort during the 1960s and 1970s as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee to rein in the escalating powers of the presidency and get the US Senate to fulfill its foreign policy oversight role.

During his first senatorial bid in 1954, Case faced criticisms from conservative Republicans in New Jersey who argued that he was, as one critic described him, a "renegade Democrat" (59), whose liberal views, support from organized labor, and willingness to challenge Joseph McCarthy made him insufficiently conservative to represent the state's Republicans. Despite the opposition, Case defeated his conservative primary opponent and kept conservative challengers at bay until 1978. Throughout his career, Case faced criticisms from fellow Republicans, but he refused to be dissuaded from the "modern Republicanism"—a term conceived by the Eisenhower administration—that he advocated (49). A prime example of his independence came in 1964 when he refused to endorse Barry Goldwater, the Republican presidential nominee, because of his opposition to federal civil rights legislation. Case also set

aside partisanship during the Nixon administration when he opposed three of the president's Supreme Court nominations (Clement Haynsworth, G. Harrold Carswell, and William Rehnquist) in large part due to their opposition to federal civil rights protections, and he consistently interrogated and eventually worked to restrain the president's escalation of US bombing in Southeast Asia.

Fernekes contextualizes Case's failure to win a fifth term in the Senate by situating it within an era when numerous liberal Republicans were primaried as conservatives culled liberal outliers from the GOP. Jeffrey Bell, a little-known conservative figure in New Jersey, helped usher in the end of Case's political career when he primaried him in June 1978. Bell, who moved to Trenton to establish residency, was able to capitalize on the vibrant conservative movement and the fundraising apparatus created by Richard Viguerie to amass a considerable war chest from small donors who resided outside of New Jersey. Meanwhile, Case, who had a long-standing aversion to soliciting donations for fear people would think he was beholden to them, took a traditional approach to politics that would soon be untenable in a new era of perpetual fundraising. Case's loss provides important insight for readers interested in the conservative turn of the Republican Party and the varied factors that contributed to its takeover of the GOP. Rather than attribute the loss to an inevitable wave of conservatism, Fernekes demonstrates that Case's defeat could plausibly be attributed to a range of reasons including overconfidence, misleading private polling data, overreliance on establishment endorsements, a lack of television ads, and the detached campaign of an incumbent who spent the final day of campaigning in Washington, DC, on Senate business while his challenger shook the hands of commuters in Trenton. The author's careful attention to detail results in a nuanced account of Case's defeat and the incremental dismantling of liberal Republicanism. It also helps to contextualize liberal

Republicans' loss of power within a historiography that tends to overlook or mischaracterize the Northeastern Republican tradition.

Despite careful attention to the innerworkings of Case's campaigns and Republican Party politics in New Jersey, it is less clear what Case's constituents—rank-and-file Republicans, in particular—thought of liberal Republicanism throughout his career. Fernekes cites several polls in the months before Case's defeat that found that many of his constituents struggled to name any of his accomplishments despite his outsized influence as a major figure in the Senate. A 1978 Eagleton Institute poll found, for example, that “only 33 percent of respondents could name Case as one of two senators from New Jersey” (351). It is striking that so many New Jersey residents were unaware of who represented them in the Senate when Case had been such a consequential leader. This polling data, however, does not allow for an assessment of voters' views on liberal Republicanism. It would be interesting to know what Case's constituents thought of his policy positions and his style of leadership in a more sustained way from the 1940s to the 1970s. Increased focus on the views of voters might also help to explain the seeming disappearance of liberal Republicans like Case.

*Clifford Case and the Challenge of Liberal Republicanism* concludes with an assessment of Case's legacy as a legislator, liberal Republican, public servant, and individual. Fernekes incorporates moving tributes to Case that highlight his conscientiousness, kindness, and commitment to serving the public with the highest ethical standards possible. Fernekes includes a WNYC-TV New York tribute to Case that appeared shortly after his death on March 5, 1982: “There are too few Clifford Cases in the rol[e] of politicians. The best thing we can say is, we hope we will see his like again” (396). Upon reading this book, regardless of your political beliefs, you are likely to conclude similarly.

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