Citation metadata
Author: John W. Sloan
Date: Sept. 2000
From: Social Science Quarterly (Vol. 81, Issue 3)
Publisher: University of Texas at Austin (University of Texas Press)
Document Type: Book review
Length: 1,076 words

Main content
Article Preview:


Few books have been as anxiously awaited by presidential scholars as Edmund Morris' biography of Ronald Reagan. After winning the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1980 for writing The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt, Morris was recruited by Nancy Reagan and Michael Deaver to pen an authorized biography of Ronald Reagan. Based on his reputation and on his being the first biographer ever to be granted such access to an incumbent president, Morris was able to negotiate a $3 million advance from Random House for the Reagan manuscript.

Conservatives undoubtedly hoped that Morris' book would elevate Reagan's status to that of a great president on par with FDR and worthy of a place on Mount Rushmore. This book will not accomplish that goal. Reviewers have inevitably spent more time discussing Morris and his fictional technique than anything he may have written about Reagan's domestic and foreign policy achievements. The reason is simple: Morris did not write a biography of Reagan or an in-depth study of his presidency; he wrote a memoir of his fictional and real self observing Reagan.

How can this be explained? First, the foreign-born Morris is not a scholar. He worked as an advertising copywriter in London before immigrating to the United States in 1968. His project on Theodore Roosevelt was originally a screenplay titled "The Dude from New York." Only after it was rejected as a screenplay did Morris turn it into a biography. His interests lie in literature, music, and foreign language; in...