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UCSB Library to House Author Lou Cannon's Reagan and Rodney King Papers

The University Library at UC Santa Barbara has acquired the papers of presidential biographer and former White House correspondent Lou Cannon, who wrote five books about the legacy of Ronald W. Reagan and four other books, including "Official Negligence," a comprehensive social history about the Rodney King beating and the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

"The Ronald Reagan and the Rodney King archives that are now housed in Special Collections at UC Santa Barbara represent my life's work, and I'm pleased they've found such a good home," said Cannon.

"All writers stand on the shoulders of others, and I could never have written any of these books without the valuable work of those who came before me.

It is my hope that there will be other writers who will do even better work because of the information preserved in these collections."

Cannon is widely considered the nation's leading authority on the career and administrations of President Reagan.

He covered politics for the Washington Post for 26 years and was a Sacramento reporter for the San Jose Mercury News early in his career.

The collections contain primary source material gathered for his books "Ronnie and Jesse: A Political Odyssey (1969); "Reagan" (1982); "President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime (1991); "Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power" (2003); and "Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD" (1997).

"On behalf of UC Santa Barbara, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Lou and Mary Cannon for choosing our campus to receive their extraordinary gift of the Lou Cannon – Rodney King, Los Angeles Riots archive," said UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang.

"We are also immensely grateful to UCSB Foundation Trustee Sara Miller McCune, Patricia Van Every, and the Donald T. Leahy Trust for their generous support to help us acquire Lou's Ronald Reagan archive. Together these papers represent an important and valuable legacy. We appreciate the devotion of both Lou and Mary for making these papers available for study by future generations of scholars, and we are honored to be chosen as the home for this historic body of work."

The Cannon collections provide an insider's view, a journalist's perspective on major economic, social, historical, and political issues of the time, many that are still relevant today, noted David Tambo, head of Special Collections.

Tambo is compiling detailed guides for the expansive archives, which are already available for use by researchers and the public.

"We are so pleased the Cannons chose the UCSB Library to be the home of these important historic papers," said Brenda Johnson, university librarian.

"Scholars in a wide range of fields, including California and U.S. history, economics, the electoral process, international relations, journalism, and the legal system, will find these primary source materials highly significant.

These papers, like others at the library, are open to all interested users. We welcome everyone to visit and look at these windows on history."

The Reagan papers consist of recorded interviews, White House briefings, and research conducted by Cannon on major issues, such as arms control, the economy, taxes, the Iran-Contra affair, and foreign policy.

Files on individuals read like a "Who's Who" of the period and include James Baker, George H. W. Bush, William Casey, David Gergen, Alexander Haig, Jr., Jeane Kirkpatrick, Henry Kissinger, Robert McFarlane, Edwin Meese, John Poindexter, Colin Powell, Nancy Reagan, and Caspar Weinberger.

The Rodney King, Los Angeles Riots Collection also contains extensive interviews, as well as court documents, materials related to the investigation of the Los Angeles Police Department, and files on police brutality, racism, race relations, the Christopher Commission, and the rebuilding of Los Angeles, for example.

Included in the collection is a heart-wrenching memoir by the schoolchildren of Central Los Angeles.

In English and Spanish, poetry, and with pencil drawings, they wrote about what they saw and how it affected their lives in "What I Remember About the Riots."

The memoir is unedited and duplicated by the United Ministry at the University of Southern California and the Educational Consortium of Central Los Angeles (1993).

"This was a seminal period in Los Angeles history and the history of California, and also in race relations and African American history in the course of this country," said Tambo.

"People will want to continue to research these important collections because they provide first-hand accounts and documentary evidence for events, beyond what was seen in newspaper or television coverage."

University Library collections related to the Cannon papers include the extensive archives of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions that addressed pressing economic, political, and social issues facing America between 1959-1987, and the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, which document the lives and activities of African Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans, Chicanos/Latinos, and Native Americans in the state.

For more information about the Cannon papers, contact David Tambo in Special Collections at (805) 893-3420 or tambo@library.ucsb.edu.

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