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Exhibition, Talks at UCSB Focus on Reagan and Lincoln Presidencies

In commemoration of Ronald Reagan's 100th birthday, the Department of Special Collections at UC Santa Barbara's Davidson Library is presenting "The American Presidency," an exhibition of printed materials, artifacts, and ephemera from the Lou Cannon and William Wyles collections.

"The items in The American Presidency exhibit draw from a wide range of our holdings," said David Tambo, head of Special Collections. "There are some quite unusual things that visitors will find interesting -- from copies of books that Abraham Lincoln read and descriptions of how they influenced his life, to excerpts of interviews by Reagan biographer Lou Cannon that explore the question of who the 'real Reagan' was."

In conjunction with the exhibition, Cannon and John Woolley, professor and chair of political science, will give special talks on Thursday, February 24. Cannon's topic will be "Finding Reagan: A Biographer's Odyssey." Woolley, co-director of UCSB's American Presidency Project (APP), will give an overview of the online archive and how it can be used. The APP contains 88,932 documents related to the study of the Presidency, and Woolley will show how the resources of the archive can be used to examine the Reagan presidency and to compare and contrast Reagan and President Obama.

"To understand contemporary U.S. presidents, it is always helpful to contrast them to their predecessors," Woolley said. "The American Presidency Project is trying to make it easy to make those contrasts."

The talks will begin at 4 p.m. in the Mary Cheadle Room of Davidson Library. They are free and open to the public.

The Reagan Archive, which was acquired by UCSB in 2009, consists of recorded interviews, White House briefings, and research conducted by Cannon on major issues, including arms control, the economy, taxes, the Iran-Contra affair, and foreign policy.

A former White House correspondent for The Washington Post and the author of five books on Reagan, Cannon is considered the nation's leading authority on the career and administrations of the 40th president of the United States. Among the recorded interviews included in the Reagan Archive are conversations with key individuals of the period, such as 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 Wyles collection is UCSB's first "special collection," and still one of the largest, with more than 35,000 volumes on Abraham Lincoln, slavery, abolition, the Civil War, American expansion, travel in America, and the American West. The collection also contains more than 100 separate manuscript collections and 800 small collections, with correspondence, diaries, and photographs of individuals and families -- many with Civil War connections -- and records of Civil War military units. Other materials include slave documents -- bills of sale, manumission papers -- and individual manuscript items relating to U.S. presidents, generals, and other important figures, such as Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, and William Tecumseh Sherman.

While the exhibition is linked to Reagan's birthday, Woolley noted other upcoming dates of presidential significance. Among them are Abraham Lincoln's and George Washington's birthdays, and President's Day. "Also, we've just had the 50th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's inaugural," he noted, "and in March will be the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's inaugural."

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