

INTRODUCTION

Millard Fillmore Caldwell possessed the glamour and confidence of a matinee idol. He rode horses in California, lassoed calves in Texas, and filibustered on the floor of the U.S. Capitol. Hollywood could easily have cast him as Gary Cooper's double in *High Noon*, or Alan Ladd's *Shane*, though not as the role model for Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Endowed with a tall frame and blessed with a commanding presence and an economy of speech, he was also wealthy, by dint of inheritance and intelligence. Dashing handsome with an aristocratic countenance, he lived a comfortable life as a wealthy lawyer and country gentleman who never lost touch with the common folk. Politically, he was a Yellow-Dog Democrat, a Cracker-folk saying meaning that many Floridians would sooner vote for a cur dog than a Republican! Philosophically, he was a Jeffersonian Republican who would have been comfortable on a tobacco farmstead in colonial Virginia. His ancestors fought in the American Revolution. His family owned cotton plantations in Mississippi and ranches in California. A patrician, he wore his conservatism like Roman breastplate.

Caldwell was a Democratic congressman at the birth of the New Deal but resigned due to his dislike of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his disapproval of big government. Elected governor of Florida during World War II, Caldwell defended lynching, but championed progressive educational reform. He defied conservative lobbyists over the issue of

regressive state taxes but defended the constitutionality of the White Primary. While he may have loathed campaigning for office, he was a natural, never losing a single election. No Floridian ever held so many important positions after he left the governor's mansion.

In 1950, Caldwell provided a convenient target for civil rights leaders when, nominated as the first director of the Federal Civil Defense Administration by President Truman, the nominee refused to address black leaders respectfully. As a Florida Supreme Court judge and private citizen in the 1960s and 1970s, Caldwell played the role of a wrathful Moses scolding a sinful society about cultural excesses, judicial overreach, and political liberalism.

Millard Caldwell exuded confidence, seeming to care little what voters or political leaders in his own party or state thought of him. His life could have inspired the role model for America's "tradition-directed man." David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) seemed pitch perfect in a postwar America with its expanding middle classes—"other-directed men"—seeking or accepting conformity. To Americans, exhausted from decades of identity and hyphenated politics, belonging became an end. Raised in a tradition-directed community and time, Caldwell understood his position, place, and sense of responsibility. Core principles—the Bible's parables and country proverbs, family values and heroic role models—guided Millard through life's passages. A Tennessean, he memorized Davy Crockett's adage: "Be sure you're right, then go ahead."

Caldwell idolized another Tennessean, Andrew Jackson, and adopted Old Hickory's cocksure political practices and social graces. "To the victors go the spoils," he reminded disappointed job-seekers. Jackson and Caldwell rarely apologized, reconciled, or backed down from a fight. Core values served as an "internal gyroscope." Other-directed men maneuvered through life equipped with a "radar," more concerned with belonging and being popular. Few political figures seemed less interested in whether voters liked him than Caldwell. Blunt, his handshake measured his manhood and assured his word. He needed neither consultants nor pollsters. Refusing to adjust his hidebound attitudes toward race and the role of the

federal government in a rapidly changing state and society left him vulnerable to criticism.¹

He was the last Florida governor born in the nineteenth century and the first to govern in the atomic age. But while Caldwell's political instincts were unerring, his attitudes toward race and citizenship strike today's Americans as embarrassing, even shocking. He is a classic example of one of the inherent contradictions of leadership. Americans like men and women who remain faithful to their core convictions. But what happens when such convictions turn out to be on the wrong side of history? In Caldwell's case, he remained unapologetic, even dogmatic, about segregation, insisting that the Southern way of life must not change. He was tone deaf on the most significant issue of the twentieth century: racial justice.

The date was 1944, and Melpomene, Thalia, and Clio—the Muses of Tragedy, Comedy, and History—hovered over the Old Vic in London. Laurence Olivier, thirty-seven years old and in his prime, prepared for a dream role aimed to stir British souls in trying times. He would direct and star in *Henry V*, Shakespeare's play about foreign wars, patriotism, and manhood. But first he was committed to play the dashing Major Sergius in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. After watching the play, the Irish theatrical director Tyrone Guthrie came backstage. He asked the star, "Don't you *love* Sergius?" Olivier shrugged at the question, "Decidedly not!" Guthrie responded icily, "Well, of course, if you can't love him, you'll never be any good in him, will you?" Three years later, King George VI knighted Olivier, who became the first British actor to receive a life peerage. He later reflected Guthrie had provided him a priceless lesson in acting.²

As the biographer of Millard Fillmore Caldwell, I confess to admiring many of the subject's qualities, but abhorring others. I applaud his pride in military service and civic duty, but recoil at his political stubbornness and racial insensitivities. A fascinating subject who lived in turbulent times, he was also a willing prisoner of his time and place. Were Caldwell to read my reservations, he would surely quote Martin Luther, who defiantly proclaimed at the Diet of Worms in 1521, "Here I stand! I can do no other."