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Meese, Edwin III (1931 -)

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Meese, Edwin III (1931–). U.S. attorney general. Born in Oakland, Calif., Meese received a B.A. from Yale (1953) and an LL.B. from the University of California, Berkeley (1956). After working at the Piedmont, Calif., Recreation Department, he became deputy district attorney in Alameda County, Calif., in 1959. In 1967, he joined the staff of Governor Ronald Reagan as legal affairs secretary, holding this post until 1969, when he became Reagan's executive assistant and chief of staff. He also served as the chairman of the Governor's Emergency Operations Council during the urban and campus disorders of the 1960s and early 1970s. After a short stint in business, Meese practiced law and taught at the University of San Diego School of Law from 1977 to 1980.

In 1980, Meese became the chief of staff and senior policy adviser in Reagan's presidential campaign; upon Reagan's victory, he became director of the presidential transition team. His first post in the Reagan administration was as counselor to the president; he also served as a member of the Cabinet and of the Na-

tional Security Council throughout Reagan's presidency. In 1985, Meese was appointed attorney general, a position he held until 1988. He also served as chairman of both the President's Domestic Policy Council and the National Drug Policy Board.

In many ways, Meese was the most politically attuned attorney general since Robert Kennedy. Certainly, he was closer to the president he served than any other attorney general since Kennedy. He pushed a legal agenda that went beyond courtrooms and prosecutors. He argued that *Roe v. Wade* be overruled; he fought what he saw as the moral indignity of affirmative action quotas; and he attempted to place on the federal bench judges who would not act, as Reagan had put it, like a "bunch of sociology majors." Although many conservatives suspected that the American Civil Liberties Union was a "criminals' lobby," Meese had the nerve to say it. As the silent majority seethed when a judge would let a criminal off on a technicality, he gave vent to their frustration: he viewed *Miranda v. Arizona* as an "infamous decision." He was willing to argue that the people have a right to order the moral, legal, and political content of their lives to a far greater degree than judges often allowed.

Each of the positions Meese advocated was rooted in his understanding of what constituted good government. The various policies were the logical outcomes of his belief that the written Constitution means something, that limited government is the key to individual liberty, and that separation of powers and federalism are not arcane legalisms but vital principles of daily governance. At the foundation of his constitutional views was an unfaltering belief that the judicial interpretation of the Constitution must be guided by an adherence to the original intention of the founders. In a series of very public speeches as attorney general, Meese advocated a recovery of what he called a "jurisprudence of original intention," an approach to interpretation that would take seriously the founders' design and thereby serve as the legitimate brake on judges inclined to import their own moral theories into the law. The speeches sparked, as Meese hoped, continuing and impassioned public debate.

During his time in the Reagan administration, Meese gained the reputation of being one of the president's most loyal and trusted aides. Thus it was no surprise to those who knew him best that Meese insisted that the Iran-Contra boondoggle be fully and robustly investigated. No matter how embarrassing it might be for the administration, his sense of public integrity born of years of government service demanded nothing less. And it was that same sense of public integrity and personal loyalty to the president that bol-

stered Meese himself during two investigations into his own affairs by the Office of the Independent Counsel, investigations that ended in his exoneration of any wrongdoing.

After leaving government service, Meese continued to speak and write about the constitutional and legal issues he advocated while attorney general. Since 1988 he has been a distinguished fellow at both the Hoover Institution and at the Heritage Foundation, where he also holds the Ronald Reagan Chair in Public Policy and chairs the Center for Legal and Judicial Studies.

GARY L. MCDOWELL

Lee Edwards, *To Preserve and Protect: The Life of Edwin Meese III* (2005); Edwin Meese III, *With Reagan: The Inside Story* (1992).