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THE STEVENSONS

*A Biography of an American
Family*



JEAN H. BAKER



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*This book is dedicated to
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On primary election night an astonishing example of the follies of contemporary politics was revealed to a man who held a good chance to defeat Thompson. Two followers of Lyndon LaRouche had upset Stevenson's hand-picked candidates for lieutenant governor and secretary of state. LaRouche's incomprehensible, often anti-Semitic platform, conveyed to voters at malls and airports and through megaphones at street corners, featured attacks on Henry Kissinger and Queen Elizabeth as KGB agents and drug runners, support for the development of weapons in space, and universal testing for AIDS. No doubt only a few of the over 200,000 Illinoisians who had voted for the followers of Lyndon LaRouche's National Democratic Policy Committee supported the positions of candidates who wanted to send tanks down State Street to end drug trafficking and who thrust a pound of raw liver into the hands of Chicago's Catholic archbishop. Some confused the LaRouches with libertarians; others were attracted to the LaRouche assertion that "people are sick of the lies and corruption of the Democratic party and its establishment leaders." But most, in this apartisan age, followed only national elections and celebrity candidates and knew not for whom they voted.

Rather than a LaRouche victory, the Democratic primary of 1986 was a Stevenson defeat. The candidate of issues and meaningful politics found himself cobbled on the Democratic ballot with two extremists. Stevenson had been penalized by his own—and his fellow Illinoisians'—indifference to primaries, a democratic system of participation that over the years had eroded party organization. By the end of the twentieth century, what could not have happened in Adlai I's time of strong political parties or even in Adlai II's time of powerful state leaders like Richard Daley had ruined Adlai III's chances for election. But this was a partially self-inflicted wound, the result of Stevenson's disdain for party politics.

Only a quarter of the more than six million registered Illinois voters had cast ballots on the rainy March primary day; the antiseptic, Anglo-Saxon names of the LaRouche supporters, which came first on the ballot—Mark Fairchild and Janice Hart—appealed to some downstate voters more than those of the regulars Aurelia Pucinski and George Sangmeister. Democrats in all the counties where the Stevensons had lived—McLean, Lake, and Jo Daviess—favored the LaRouches, in a catastrophe beyond imagining in Richard Daley's time. Vowing that he would never run on a ticket with "neo-Nazis," Stevenson struggled to find a way to run for the job that "I have in my bones. I've been training for it all my life."

Some Democrats suggested that, if he won, Adlai Stevenson could simply abolish the post of lieutenant governor. Others, including Congressman Dan Rostenkowski, urged Stevensons's resignation from the ticket so that the party could nominate another candidate. "He has no right to put himself above the party," complained leaders whose primary allegiance was still to

the party, as it had never been for the Stevensons. Meanwhile, during a season of setbacks as Stevenson probed the possibilities of running as an independent (and found he had missed the filing date) and finally settled on running as a third-party candidate on the newly created Illinois Solidarity ticket with two new running mates, he suffered other injuries—a cracked vertebra in a fall from a horse and, in a later accident, a broken foot. While the press made much of his gentleman's recreation of horseback riding and noted that he lived so far from Chicago that he had been taken in an ambulance to a hospital in Iowa, Stevenson acknowledged that he drove a Japanese pickup truck. "That truck saved me \$1500. I've got four vehicles all American except one. If I had known I was running then, I wouldn't have done it."

As Stevenson hobbled about the state in the blazing hot summer of 1986, yearning for "the peace and tranquillity that I knew as a tank commander in Korea," he was not bringing the message of economic reform to the state. Nor on the fly-arounds that now took candidates by air from town to town was he accomplishing what he considered the campaign's purpose: "I really don't consider the object of a campaign is winning. I think the object is informing the people so that they can make sensible decisions." Instead, he was trying to get the 25,000 signatures necessary to get on the ballot as a third-party candidate. Still lacking a campaigner's common touch, he was once observed eating lunch in Belleville without attempting to greet other customers.

"Good public servants are known by their enemies" had long been a Stevenson commandment, and by 1986 these enemies included major donors such as the American-Israeli Political Action Committee, and the Illinois AFL-CIO and United Mine Workers, who for the first time in Illinois history supported a Republican. "If [Thompson] were a woman, he'd be pregnant all the time," charged Stevenson of the governors' relationship with special-interest groups such as labor, thereby infuriating feminist voters who remembered that though Stevenson had supported the Equal Rights Amendment, he had earlier refused to have a female running mate on his ticket because "a woman couldn't be aggressive enough without being shrill and strident." By the summer the National Organization of Women withdrew its endorsement. And as the only Democratic senator to vote against limiting the age of mandatory retirement to seventy, he lost the votes of senior citizens. Then he made hometown enemies by opposing the incentives Thompson had offered the Japanese auto maker Mitsubishi to attract it to job-hungry Bloomington.

Having lost his straight ticket advantage, the man who despised pollsters and party tyranny—because "I'm no good if I don't know what's on the minds of the people of Illinois"—compromised. He hired political consultants and public relations specialists, one of whom acknowledged that