

# Reagan

## His Place In History



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# Reagan His Place In History

## Six Aspects Of The Man—Three Political, Three Personal— Hint At How Posterity Will View Him

by Richard Brookhiser

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The Mt. Rushmore Sculptures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln (left to right) represent the first 130 years of the history of the United States.

### CONTEMPORARY JUDGMENTS OF PRESIDENTS

are notoriously erratic.

Consider the four who decorate Mount Rushmore, the stony seal of posterity's approval. Although Washington retired with almost universally good reviews, Benjamin Franklin's grandson did say he had "debauched" the nation. Jefferson left the White House with the joy of an escaping prisoner and a stress-induced migraine condition. The Senate was so angry with Theodore Roosevelt in his last days in office that it refused to accept his communications. Lincoln, who tops every historian's rating of Presidents, was murdered.

When Ronald Reagan left office in 1989, he truly retired, intending no Nixonian or Carteresque codas, and the onset of Alzheimer's was soon setting his agenda in any case. Journalists and historians could thus get an early start on their posthumous shiftings. But their work will go on for years. The talented Edmund Morris was given a clean shot at writing the definitive early account, like John Marshall's biography of Washington (or Edwin O'Connor's fictional portrait of James Michael Curley), but Morris produced such an eccentric work that even that task will have to be done, and redone.

Whatever the writers finally come up with, all their labors, like all the events of their subject's career, will be distilled by the national memory into two or three facts or phrases, maybe only



one. My childhood history of the Presidents, which had to find something important and moderately good to say about every Chief Executive, could at least say of Millard Fillmore that he sent Commodore Perry to Japan.

Here is a preliminary list of six aspects of Ronald Reagan—three personal, three political—from which those in the year 2075 may make their selection.

Like notable predecessors—Jefferson, FDR—Reagan had an optimistic view of things. Also like them, he had demons and enemies. But he was serenely confident that he would prevail. His political optimism came from a buoyant temperament. The command performance for his personality was the moment when, at the age of 70, one of John Hinckley's bullets lodged an inch from his heart. He spent his time, before and after the operation that saved his life, cracking jokes almost as old as himself.

We often use military metaphors to describe normal political controversy—for instance, a "barrage" of criticism. Ronald Reagan reacted to actual gunfire with better humor than many politicians do to bad headlines.

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In normal circumstances, Reagan's favorite story about his sunny worldview concerned two boys who were told to clean out a stable. The task proved so Augean that one of them gave up. The other kept going. With so much excrement, he reasoned, there had to be a pony in there somewhere.

That story conveyed a truth about Reagan's optimism: It was willed, sometimes contrary to all reason. Another story, which he told on the opening pages of his first memoir, the 1965 *Where's the Rest of Me?*, supplies the psychological background of his determined hopefulness. Reagan describes finding his father, Jack, a genial, but alcoholic, shoe salesman, collapsed on the front porch one night after a binge. The scene was pure Frank Capra,



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down to the weather conditions: Jack Reagan's "hair [was] soaked with melting snow." As in some Frank Capra movies, there was also a dark subtext beneath a sentimental gloss. Ronald remembered helping his father, pityingly, to bed: "I could feel no resentment." If he couldn't feel any, why does he mention it? Any drunk's child feels a host of negative emotions: resentment, anger, betrayal. Each child then deals with them in his own way. Ronald Reagan's way was to dismiss his pain and to focus on the bright side: "In a few days" his father "was the bluff, hearty man I knew and loved." In later life, Reagan would blot out both real problems and false obstacles, as well as bullets.

The black velvet backdrop behind his cheerfulness explains a second salient trait of Reagan's: his coldness. Yes, he had a funny story for everyone, including Tip O'Neill and Mikhail Gorbachev, and he laughed at other people's funny stories, not just his own. But behind the bonhomie, there was nothing accessible. "Even as a teenager," wrote Edmund Morris, "he had taken no personal interest in people. They were, and remained, a faceless audience to his perpetual performance." Certainly Morris felt faceless in Reagan's presence, which seems to have driven the biographer to distraction. But he was not the only one. People who worked with Reagan closely for years felt they never penetrated. According to his speechwriter Peggy Noonan, White House staffers made jokes of his elusiveness: "Who was that masked man?"

Reagan's coldness allowed him to be stubborn. He used all the resources of public relations, from marks on the floor to theme-of-the-day spin control to movie-star looks, to make his case. But after he had done all that he could do, he did not care what people thought of him. He had his message; when he became President, he had his programs; that was that. He often settled for less than he wanted, but he never stopped wanting it. His stubbornness helped him reach the White House despite one of the more discouraging pre-victory political records. Some politicians have won second contests after previously losing runs for the Presidency: Andrew Jackson, Richard Nixon. Some have won, after one failed attempt to secure their party's nomination: James Monroe, George H. W. Bush. Reagan failed twice to get the Republican nomination—in 1968 and 1976—before lightning struck. Repeat losers, from Henry Clay to Bob Dole, usually go on losing. Only Reagan broke the pattern.



Ronald Reagan in Dixon, Illinois, 1920's.

Reagan's third important personal trait was simplicity. The literature of management is filled with variations on the polarity between big-picture men and detail men; in the realm of philosophy, Isaiah Berlin taught us to think of hedgehogs (the thinkers who see in the universe one big thing) and foxes (the thinkers who see multiplicity). The characteristic mistake of big-picture hedgehogs is to ignore details that are in fact crucial; the characteristic mistake of detail foxes is to assume that hedgehogs see nothing at all. John Quincy Adams, the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard, called Andrew Jackson a "barbarian" who "hardly could spell his own name"

this was five years after Jackson had cleaned Adams's clock in the election of 1828.

*President Ronald Reagan always kept a bowl of jelly beans (his favorite snack) on the conference table during cabinet meetings.*



Tip O'Neill, no Boylston Professor of Rhetoric but a Massachusetts politician, like Adams, said Reagan knew "less than any president I've ever known" (O'Neill, like Adams, also had his clock cleaned by his ignoramus enemy). Reagan indeed was about as far over in the direction of the big picture and hedgehog as it is possible to be. In his book *The Presidential Difference*, the political scientist Fred I. Greenstein made a useful movie-industry analogy to Reagan's intellectual and management style. Reagan obviously was the star of his own administration, but he was also its producer. The writing, even the directing, could always be left to someone else. He was responsible for Reaganism. What was that? The most concentrated (Reaganesque?) summary of its leading heads was made by the journalist R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.: "The Evil Empire; cut taxes; the pieties." The economist Milton Friedman daydreams about an income tax return so simple it could be printed on a postcard. Reaganism could be jotted down on the back of a business card.

What fell off the card, Reagan believed, could safely be ignored. Pat Buchanan, another speechwriter, remembered sitting in on a cabinet-level debate between Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Agriculture John Block on grain exports. While it raged, Reagan reached for a bowl of jellybeans, his favorite snack

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food, and began picking out his favorite colors. “My God,” Buchanan thought, “what in heaven’s name is with this guy?” Reagan, who caught Buchanan’s eye, winked. Buchanan interpreted the wink to mean: “They’re having an argument here, and I’m not getting into it.” Maybe that is what the wink meant. Or maybe—the coldness kicking in—it was Reagan’s way of averting an intrusive gaze. In either case, Mr. Shultz and Mr. Block were not attended to. That was safe enough when the subject was grain exports; less safe when it was the money shuffling of Lt. Col. Oliver North.

On the issues that constituted Reaganism, Reagan batted two for three. It became the fashion, after their collapse, to dismiss Communism and the Soviet Union as threats. It is easy to be wise after the fact. In the late seventies, Cuban soldiers patrolled the former Portuguese empire in Africa. The Soviets had acquired two new client states in the Western Hemisphere, Nicaragua and Grenada, and had invaded Afghanistan. Western Europe was rocked by a pro-Communist peace movement, terrified by the introduction of Soviet and American intermediate-range missiles on European soil.

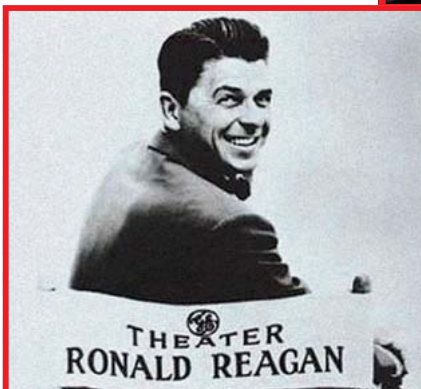
Reagan’s distrust of Communism was deep and longstanding. As a president of the Screen Actors Guild, he had seen Communist attempts to take over Hollywood crafts unions; when the guild’s position on these turf wars shifted from neutral to anti-

Communist, Reagan got an anonymous phone call on a movie set threatening that his face would be “fix[ed].” Early in the fifties, he read *Witness*, by the former Communist spy Whittaker Chambers. *Witness* was more than an espionage memoir; in one passage, Chambers recalled that the delicate folds of his baby daughter’s ears persuaded him that the universe was divinely designed and that scientific socialism was false. Three decades later, Reagan cited the passage on the baby’s ear to White House speechwriter Tony Dolan. Reagan was not well read, but what he read lodged in his mind.

Because of his optimism, he never adopted the defensive power-sharing strategy of longtime anti-Communists like Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. He thought Communism was bad, and he thought it was doomed. When he became President, he



President Ronald Reagan with Caspar Weinberger, George Shultz, Ed Meese, and Don Regan discussing the President's remarks on the Iran-Contra affair, Oval Office.



Before entering politics Reagan was an actor and president of the Screen Actors Guild.

confidently declared that freedom and the West would “transcend” Communism, that it would end “on the ash-heap of history,” that the Berlin Wall should be torn down.

The steps he took to bring this about included rolling back Communist gains at the margins, invading Grenada, supporting a counterrevolution in Nicaragua, and sending Stinger missiles to the Afghan resistance. (As in all wars, there were unintended consequences, as the Taliban and Osama bin Laden demonstrate.) He announced that he would take advantage of America’s lead in high tech by producing a missile defense system. Critics derided the Strategic Defense Initiative as a fantasy from *Star Wars*; Reagan embraced the pop-culture reference. He never deployed the system, and tests of its effectiveness continue to this day, as do arguments over the results. But the threat worried the Soviets; Gorbachev’s foreign minister, Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, told a 1993 conference of Cold Warriors at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs that SDI caused a tug of war inside the Soviet bureaucracy that was reflected in the divided purposes of the Gorbachev regime. Former Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci said at the same press conference that he “never believed” in SDI, and his skepticism may prove to be justified. On the other hand, the Cold War postmortem at which Bessmertnykh and Carlucci spoke was hosted by the victors, in Princeton, New Jersey, not Leningrad.

No one thing wins a war by itself. But Reagan’s appearance at the end of the Cold War was crucial. When he came into office,

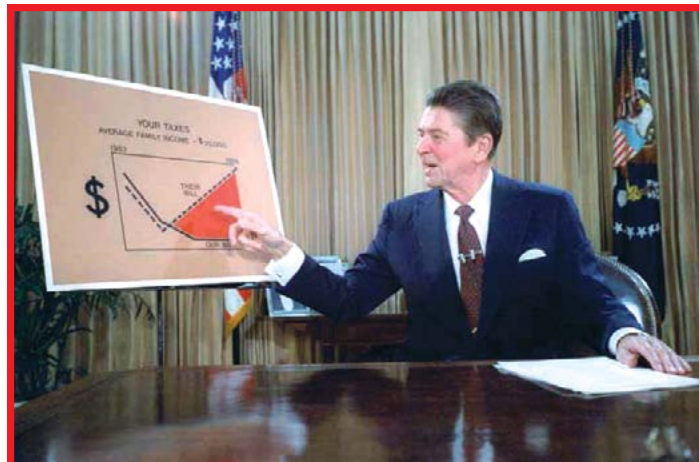


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the Soviet Union was an aggressive hard-line state; when he left, it was a reforming, improvising one partly in response to his pressures. Less than a year after he retired, the Berlin Wall was torn down; two years after that, the Soviet Union was no more. It is hard to think of a comparably rapid collapse of a major power without major bloodletting. Woodrow Wilson helped beat the Central Powers in World War I, and Franklin Roosevelt played a far larger role in beating the Axis in World War II. World War III—the Cold War—was less cataclysmic but longer, and the role of the United States was even more central. Ronald Reagan helped guarantee an American victory, without fighting a Second Battle of the Marne or a D-Day.

When Reagan came into office, the American economy seemed



Ronald Reagan's televised address from the Oval Office, outlining his plan for tax reduction legislation. July 1981.

Politicians often  
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they deplore.

as weak as the Yeltsin-era Russian army. The oil shock of the early seventies had hit it hard, and a combination of high inflation and high unemployment known as “stagflation”—which the reigning economists’ paradigm of the Phillips

curve declared to be impossible—seemed impervious to the best efforts of Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter to massage it.

Politicians often preside over transformations they deplore.

Reagan’s remedy was as theological as the passage on the baby’s ear. A school of economists, called “supply-siders,” had studied the economic impact of tax rates (Robert Mundell, the school’s founder, was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 1999). They too had a curve, shaped like a croquet wicket and named

after one of their number, Arthur Laffer, which they said showed the diminishing returns of revenue that resulted from ever-higher rates. If you cut tax rates, they argued, the economy would be stimulated, and the federal government would collect more money in tax revenues. Making use of a post-shooting wave of good feeling, Reagan was able to persuade Congress to implement something like their program.

In the event, the Laffer curve, like the Phillips curve, had some kinks in it. The great tax-rate cut was followed by two short, sharp recessions, one at the beginning of Reagan’s first term, the other at the end of George H. W. Bush’s only one. Both Bush and then Bill Clinton repudiated supply-side doctrine, though they did not in fact raise tax rates that much. The deficit, contrary to predictions, rose alarmingly, until the late nineties, when politicians began talking of surplus.

Still, the eighties and nineties were economically vastly different from the seventies. Americans worried less about OPEC or the potency of Asian models of capitalism and profited from their own. Success has many fathers. The Federal Reserve, which always goes its own way, deserves credit. So, more recently, does the computer economy, which was a spinoff of high-tech military spending. But Reagan was on the bridge when the twenty-year boom began.

On the third item of his agenda, “the pieties,” more commonly known as the social issues, Reagan was completely defeated. After signing an expansive abortion-rights bill as governor of California, Reagan came to oppose the practice. When he was elected President, abortion opponents spoke hopefully of a constitutional amendment returning jurisdiction on abortion to the states or banning abortion outright or of a congressional act (per Article III, Section 2) removing the issue from the sway of the courts. Nothing happened. When Reagan addressed audiences of gun owners



Ronald Reagan waves to the crowd minutes before the assassination attempt by John Hinckley March 30, 1981.

# Reagan His Place In History

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**Reverend Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority for social and religious conservative in 1979.**

In 1979 the Washington political operative Paul Weyrich helped the Reverend Jerry Falwell found the Moral Majority, the organization's name confidently assuming that there was such a thing, as Weyrich and Falwell defined it. In 1999 Weyrich gloomily announced that religious and social conservatives should retreat to their families and communities since the political and cultural situation was hopeless.

More objective observers like the political scientist Mark Lilla and the journalist David Frum (author of *How We Got Here: The 70's—The Decade That Brought You Modern Life—for Better or Worse*) have amplified on Weyrich's assessment, arguing that conservative politics and social liberalism are necessarily linked in

as a fellow NRA member, they helped him in Republican primaries. Gun-control supporters made little progress during his administration, but recently they have made lots, aided in no small part by the crippled presence of former press secretary James Brady, shot by one of John Hinckley's bullets. Sex continues to rock and roll through popular entertainment and, not so very long ago, even the Oval Office. Come to think of it, Reagan was the first divorced man to be elected President.

the postmodern era. Necessity is what we make of it, but they are certainly linked in contemporary practice, and nothing Reagan professed to believe altered that.

Perhaps the pieties fell victim to simplicity. It may be that a hedgehog's agenda maxes out at two big ideas. Abortion opponents were told during the early Reagan years to wait patiently while Communism and high tax rates were attended to; their turn would come. It never did.

Great generals and politicians often preside over social transformations they deplore. Washington's Farewell Address deplores the party spirit, yet partisan politics became an unshakable aspect of American life in his administration. Thomas Jefferson was the harbinger of the new era, yet as Henry Adams argued in four stout volumes, that era was not the republican, country party ideal of Jefferson's youth. If posterity accords Reagan some measure of their success—a world war and a twenty-year boom—it will also accord him their failure.

Reagan's Presidency came at the end of the twentieth century—the actual one, not the calendrical one. The twentieth century, as many historians have noted, was a short century, running from 1914 to 1991. It was also an evil century, defined by tyranny and bloodshed. The United States came through it less badly scarred than any other major power and than many small ones. Ronald Reagan, who was born in 1911, before the Evil Century began, lived to see and understand its end—which he, as much as anyone else, assured would be relatively successful. Mount Rushmore is full, and that kind of pantheon should probably be reserved for those who speak to America's spirit (then what's TR doing there?). But when historians and children have to think of Ronald Reagan at the end of the twenty-first century, they won't have to scratch around for some Commodore Perry. ❖



*The south facade of the White House, home of the President.*



# Reagan His Place In History

## First Inaugural Address

### Ronald Reagan

JANUARY 20, 1981

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/first-inaugural-address-6/>

#### FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Ronald Reagan

January 20, 1981

Senator Hatfield, Mr. Chief Justice, Mr. President, Vice President Bush, Vice President Mondale, Senator Baker, Speaker O'Neill, Reverend Moomaw, and my fellow citizens: To a few of us here today, this is a solemn and most momentous occasion; and yet, in the history of our Nation, it is a commonplace occurrence. The orderly transfer of authority as called for in the Constitution routinely takes place as it has for almost two centuries and few of us stop to think how unique we really are. In the eyes of many in the world, this every-4-year ceremony we accept as normal is nothing less than a miracle.

Mr. President, I want our fellow citizens to know how much you did to carry on this tradition. By your gracious cooperation in the transition process, you have shown a watching world that we are a united people pledged to maintaining a political system which guarantees individual liberty to a greater degree than any other, and I thank you and your people for all your help in maintaining the continuity which is the bulwark of our Republic.

The business of our nation goes forward. These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. It distorts our economic decisions, penalizes thrift, and crushes the struggling young and the fixed-income elderly alike. It threatens to shatter the lives of millions of our people.

Idle industries have cast workers into unemployment, causing human misery and personal indignity. Those who do work are denied a fair return for their labor by a tax system which penalizes successful achievement and keeps us from maintaining full productivity.

But great as our tax burden is, it has not kept pace with public spending. For decades, we have piled deficit upon deficit, mortgaging our future and our children's future for the temporary convenience of the present. To continue this long trend is to guarantee tremendous social, cultural, political, and economic upheavals.

You and I, as individuals, can, by borrowing, live beyond our means, but for only a limited period of time. Why, then, should we think that

## Reagan His Place In History First Inaugural Address – Continued –

collectively, as a nation, we are not bound by that same limitation?

We must act today in order to preserve tomorrow. And let there be no understanding—we are going to begin to act, beginning today.

The economic ills we suffer have come upon us over several decades. They will not go away in days, weeks, or months, but they will go away. They will go away because we, as Americans, have the capacity now, as we have had in the past, to do whatever needs to be done to preserve this last and greatest bastion of freedom.

In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.

From time to time, we have been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. But if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else? All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden. The solutions we seek must be equitable, with no one group singled out to pay a higher price.

We hear much of special interest groups. Our concern must be for a special interest group that has been too long neglected. It knows no sectional boundaries or ethnic and racial divisions, and it crosses political party lines. It is made up of men and women who raise our food, patrol our streets, man our mines and our factories, teach our children, keep our homes, and heal us when we are sick—professionals, industrialists, shopkeepers, clerks, cabbies, and truckdrivers. They are, in short, "We the people," this breed called Americans.

Well, this administration's objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunity for all Americans, with no barriers born of bigotry or discrimination. Putting America back to work means putting all Americans back to work. Ending inflation means freeing all Americans from the terror of runaway living costs. All must share in the productive work of this "new beginning" and all must share in the bounty of a revived economy. With the idealism and fair play which are the core of our system and our strength, we can have a strong and prosperous America at peace with itself and the world.

So, as we begin, let us take inventory. We are a nation that has a government—not the other way around. And this makes us special among the nations of the Earth. Our Government has no power except that granted it by the people. It is time to check and reverse the growth of government



## Reagan His Place In History First Inaugural Address – Continued –

which shows signs of having grown beyond the consent of the governed.

It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the States or to the people. All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government.

Now, so there will be no misunderstanding, it is not my intention to do away with government. It is, rather, to make it work—work with us, not over us; to stand by our side, not ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it; foster productivity, not stifle it.

If we look to the answer as to why, for so many years, we achieved so much, prospered as no other people on Earth, it was because here, in this land, we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before. Freedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and assured here than in any other place on Earth. The price for this freedom at times has been high, but we have never been unwilling to pay that price.

It is no coincidence that our present troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of government. It is time for us to realize that we are too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. We are not, as some would have us believe, doomed to an inevitable decline. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing. So, with all the creative energy at our command, let us begin an era of national renewal. Let us renew our determination, our courage, and our strength. And let us renew our faith and our hope.

We have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say that we are in a time when there are no heroes just don't know where to look. You can see heroes every day going in and out of factory gates. Others, a handful in number, produce enough food to feed all of us and then the world beyond. You meet heroes across a counter—and they are on both sides of that counter. There are entrepreneurs with faith in themselves and faith in an idea who create new jobs, new wealth and opportunity. They are individuals and families whose taxes support the Government and whose voluntary gifts support church, charity, culture, art, and education. Their patriotism is quiet but deep. Their values sustain our national life.

I have used the words "they" and "their" in speaking of these heroes. I could say "you" and "your" because I am addressing the heroes of whom

# Reagan His Place In History

## First Inaugural Address

– Continued –

I speak—you, the citizens of this blessed land. Your dreams, your hopes, your goals are going to be the dreams, the hopes, and the goals of this administration, so help me God.

We shall reflect the compassion that is so much a part of your makeup. How can we love our country and not love our countrymen, and loving them, reach out a hand when they fall, heal them when they are sick, and provide opportunities to make them self-sufficient so they will be equal in fact and not just in theory?

Can we solve the problems confronting us? Well, the answer is an unequivocal and emphatic "yes." To paraphrase Winston Churchill, I did not take the oath I have just taken with the intention of presiding over the dissolution of the world's strongest economy.

In the days ahead I will propose removing the roadblocks that have slowed our economy and reduced productivity. Steps will be taken aimed at restoring the balance between the various levels of government. Progress may be slow—measured in inches and feet, not miles—but we will progress. Is it time to reawaken this industrial giant, to get government back within its means, and to lighten our punitive tax burden. And these will be our first priorities, and on these principles, there will be no compromise.

On the eve of our struggle for independence a man who might have been one of the greatest among the Founding Fathers, Dr. Joseph Warren, President of the Massachusetts Congress, said to his fellow Americans, "Our country is in danger, but not to be despaired of... On you depend the fortunes of America. You are to decide the important questions upon which rests the happiness and the liberty of millions yet unborn. Act worthy of yourselves."

Well, I believe we, the Americans of today, are ready to act worthy of ourselves, ready to do what must be done to ensure happiness and liberty for ourselves, our children and our children's children.

And as we renew ourselves here in our own land, we will be seen as having greater strength throughout the world. We will again be the exemplar of freedom and a beacon of hope for those who do not now have freedom.

To those neighbors and allies who share our freedom, we will strengthen our historic ties and assure them of our support and firm commitment. We will match loyalty with loyalty. We will strive for mutually beneficial relations. We will not use our friendship to impose on their sovereignty, for our own sovereignty is not for sale.

As for the enemies of freedom, those who are potential adversaries, they

## Reagan His Place In History First Inaugural Address – Continued –

will be reminded that peace is the highest aspiration of the American people. We will negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it—now or ever.

Our forbearance should never be misunderstood. Our reluctance for conflict should not be misjudged as a failure of will. When action is required to preserve our national security, we will act. We will maintain sufficient strength to prevail if need be, knowing that if we do so we have the best chance of never having to use that strength.

Above all, we must realize that no arsenal, or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women. It is a weapon our adversaries in today's world do not have. It is a weapon that we as Americans do have. Let that be understood by those who practice terrorism and prey upon their neighbors.

I am told that tens of thousands of prayer meetings are being held on this day, and for that I am deeply grateful. We are a nation under God, and I believe God intended for us to be free. It would be fitting and good, I think, if on each Inauguration Day in future years it should be declared a day of prayer.

This is the first time in history that this ceremony has been held, as you have been told, on this West Front of the Capitol. Standing here, one faces a magnificent vista, opening up on this city's special beauty and history. At the end of this open mall are those shrines to the giants on whose shoulders we stand.

Directly in front of me, the monument to a monumental man: George Washington, Father of our country. A man of humility who came to greatness reluctantly. He led America out of revolutionary victory into infant nationhood. Off to one side, the stately memorial to Thomas Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence flames with his eloquence.

And then beyond the Reflecting Pool the dignified columns of the Lincoln Memorial. Whoever would understand in his heart the meaning of America will find it in the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Beyond those monuments to heroism is the Potomac River, and on the far shore the sloping hills of Arlington National Cemetery with its row on row of simple white markers bearing crosses or Stars of David. They add up to only a tiny fraction of the price that has been paid for our freedom.

Each one of those markers is a monument to the kinds of hero I spoke of earlier. Their lives ended in places called Belleau Wood, The Argonne, Omaha Beach, Salerno and halfway around the world on Guadalcanal, Tarawa,



# Reagan His Place In History

## First Inaugural Address

– Continued –

Pork Chop Hill, the Chosin Reservoir, and in a hundred rice paddies and jungles of a place called Vietnam.

Under one such marker lies a young man—Martin Treptow—who left his job in a small town barber shop in 1917 to go to France with the famed Rainbow Division. There, on the western front, he was killed trying to carry a message between battalions under heavy artillery fire.

We are told that on his body was found a diary. On the flyleaf under the heading, "My Pledge," he had written these words: "America must win this war. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone."

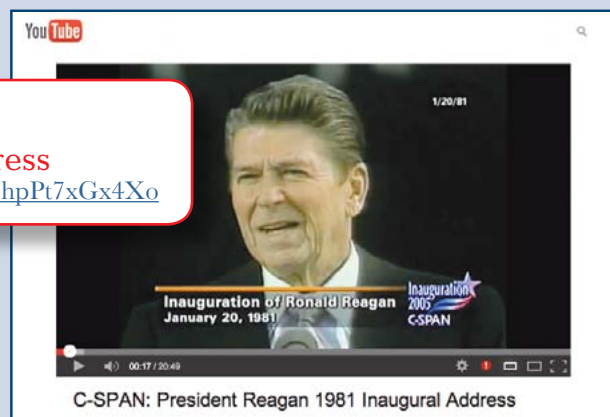
The crisis we are facing today does not require of us the kind of sacrifice that Martin Treptow and so many thousands of others were called upon to make. It does require, however, our best effort, and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds; to believe that together, with God's help, we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us.

And, after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans. God bless you, and thank you.✠

### Audio Clip of Address

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpPt7xGx4Xo>

*President Ronald Reagan's  
First Inaugural Address. Delivered  
January 20, 1981 in Washington, D.C.*



# Reagan His Place In History

## Speech on the Challenger Disaster

### Ronald Reagan

JANUARY 28, 1986

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/speech-on-the-challenger-disaster/>

#### SPEECH ON THE CHALLENGER DISASTER

Ronald Reagan

January 28, 1986

I'd planned to speak to you tonight to report on the state of the Union, but the events of earlier today have led me to change those plans. Today is a day for mourning and remembering. Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle Challenger. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country. This is truly a national loss.

Nineteen years ago, almost to the day, we lost three astronauts in a terrible accident on the ground. But, we've never lost an astronaut in flight; we've never had a tragedy like this. And perhaps we've forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle; but they, the Challenger Seven, were aware of the dangers, but overcame them and did their jobs brilliantly. We mourn seven heroes: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe. We mourn their loss as a nation together.

For the families of the seven, we cannot bear, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy. But we feel the loss, and we're thinking about you so very much. Your loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that special spirit that says, "give me a challenge and I'll meet it with joy." They had a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths. They wished to serve, and they did. They served all of us.

We've grown used to wonders in this century. It's hard to dazzle us. But for twenty-five years the United States space program has been doing just that. We've grown used to the idea of space, and perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They, the member of the Challenger crew, were pioneers.

And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's takeoff. I know it is hard



Space Shuttle Challenger's smoke plume after its in-flight breakup, resulting in its crash and the deaths of all seven crew members.

## Reagan His Place In History Speech on the Challenger Disaster – Continued –

to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them.

I've always had great faith in and respect for our space program, and what happened today does nothing to diminish it. We don't hide our space program. We don't keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front and in public. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute. We'll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue. I want to add that I wish I could talk to every man and woman who works for NASA or who worked on this mission and tell them: "Your dedication and professionalism have moved and impressed us for decades. And we know of your anguish. We share it."

There's a coincidence today. On this day 390 years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian later said, "He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it." Well, today we can say of the challenger crew: Their dedication was, like Drake's, complete.

The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for the journey and waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."

**Three days later, President Reagan delivered the following remarks  
at a memorial service held in Houston  
following the Challenger disaster,  
Jan. 31, 1986.**

We come together today to mourn the loss of seven brave Americans, to share the grief we all feel and, perhaps in that sharing, to find the strength to bear our sorrow and the courage to look for the seeds of hope. Our nation's loss is first a profound personal loss to the family and the friends and loved ones of our shuttle astronauts. To those they have left behind – the mothers, the fathers, the husbands and wives, brothers, sisters, and yes, especially the children – all of America stands beside you in your time of sorrow.

What we say today is only an inadequate expression of what we carry



## Reagan His Place In History Speech on the Challenger Disaster – Continued –



The Challenger crew: (front row) Michael J. Smith, Dick Scobee, Ronald McNair; (back row) Ellison Onizuka, Christa McAuliffe, Gregory Jarvis, Judith Resnik.

in our hearts. Words pale in the shadow of grief; they seem insufficient even to measure the brave sacrifice of those you loved and we so admired. Their truest testimony will not be in the words we speak, but in the way they led their lives and in the way they lost those lives – with dedication, honor and an unquenchable desire to explore this mysterious and beautiful universe.

The best we can do is remember our seven astronauts – our Challenger Seven – remember them as they lived, bringing

life and love and joy to those who knew them and pride to a nation.

They came from all parts of this great country – from South Carolina to Washington State; Ohio to Mohawk, New York; Hawaii to North Carolina to Concord, New Hampshire. They were so different, yet in their mission, their quest, they held so much in common.

**We remember Dick Scobee**, the commander who spoke the last words we heard from the space shuttle Challenger. He served as a fighter pilot in Vietnam, earning many medals for bravery, and later as a test pilot of advanced aircraft before joining the space program. Danger was a familiar companion to Commander Scobee.

**We remember Michael Smith**, who earned enough medals as a combat pilot to cover his chest, including the Navy Distinguished Flying Cross, three Air Medals – and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star, in gratitude from a nation that he fought to keep free.

**We remember Judith Resnik**, known as J.R. to her friends, always smiling, always eager to make a contribution, finding beauty in the music she played on her piano in her off-hours.

**We remember Ellison Onizuka**, who, as a child running barefoot through the coffee fields and macadamia groves of Hawaii, dreamed of someday traveling to the Moon. Being an Eagle Scout, he said, had helped him soar to the impressive achievement of his career.

**We remember Ronald McNair**, who said that he learned perseverance in the cotton fields of South Carolina. His dream was to live aboard the space

## Reagan His Place In History Speech on the Challenger Disaster – Continued –

station, performing experiments and playing his saxophone in the weightlessness of space; Ron, we will miss your saxophone and we will build your space station.

**We remember Gregory Jarvis.** On that ill-fated flight he was carrying with him a flag of his university in Buffalo, New York – a small token he said, to the people who unlocked his future.

**We remember Christa McAuliffe,** who captured the imagination of the entire nation, inspiring us with her pluck, her restless spirit of discovery; a teacher, not just to her students, but to an entire people, instilling us all with the excitement of this journey we ride into the future.

We will always remember them, these skilled professionals, scientists and adventurers, these artists and teachers and family men and women, and we will cherish each of their stories – stories of triumph and bravery, stories of true American heroes.

On the day of the disaster, our nation held a vigil by our television sets. In one cruel moment, our exhilaration turned to horror; we waited and watched and tried to make sense of what we had seen. That night, I listened to a call-in program on the radio: people of every age spoke of their sadness and the pride they felt in 'our astronauts.' Across America, we are reaching out, holding hands, finding comfort in one another.

The sacrifice of your loved ones has stirred the soul of our nation and, through the pain, our hearts have been opened to a profound truth – the future is not free, the story of all human progress is one of a struggle against all odds. We learned again that this America, which Abraham Lincoln called the last best hope of man on Earth, was built on heroism and noble sacrifice. It was built by men and women like our seven star voyagers, who answered a call beyond duty, who gave more than was expected or required, and who gave it with little thought to worldly reward.

We think back to the pioneers of an earlier century, and the sturdy souls who took their families and the belongings and set out into the frontier of the American West. Often, they met with terrible hardship. Along the Oregon Trail you can still see the grave markers of those who fell on the way. But grief only steeled them to the journey ahead.



Memorial service on January 31, 1986, at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, attended by Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan (left).

## Reagan His Place In History Speech on the Challenger Disaster – Continued –

Today, the frontier is space and the boundaries of human knowledge. Sometimes, when we reach for the stars, we fall short. But we must pick ourselves up again and press on despite the pain. Our nation is indeed fortunate that we can still draw on immense reservoirs of courage, character and fortitude – that we are still blessed with heroes like those of the space shuttle Challenger.

Dick Scobee knew that every launching of a space shuttle is a technological miracle. And he said, if something ever does go wrong, I hope that doesn't mean the end to the space shuttle program. Every family member I talked to asked specifically that we continue the program, that that is what their departed loved one would want above all else. We will not disappoint them.

Today, we promise Dick Scobee and his crew that their dream lives on; that the future they worked so hard to build will become reality. The dedicated men and women of NASA have lost seven members of their family. Still, they too, must forge ahead, with a space program that is effective, safe and efficient, but bold and committed.

Man will continue his conquest of space. To reach out for new goals and ever greater achievements – that is the way we shall commemorate our seven Challenger heroes.

Dick, Mike, Judy, El, Ron, Greg and Christa – your families and your country mourn your passing. We bid you goodbye. We will never forget you. For those who knew you well and loved you, the pain will be deep and enduring. A nation, too, will long feel the loss of her seven sons and daughters, her seven good friends. We can find consolation only in faith, for we know in our hearts that you who flew so high and so proud now make your home beyond the stars, safe in God's promise of eternal life.

May God bless you all and give you comfort in this difficult time. ☒

### Audio Clip of Address

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEifG9H8eWs>

*President Ronald Reagan's Address to the Nation  
on the Challenger Disaster, Delivered  
January 28, 1986 in Washington, D.C.*





# Reagan His Place In History

## Farewell Address

### Ronald Reagan

JANUARY 11, 1989

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/farewell-address-2/>



FAREWELL ADDRESS

Ronald Reagan

January 11, 1989

My fellow Americans:

This is the 34th time I'll speak to you from the Oval Office – and the last. We've been together for eight years now, and soon it'll be time for me to go. But before I do, I wanted to share some thoughts, some of which I've been saying for a long time.

It's been the honor of my life to be your president. So many of you have written the past few weeks to say thanks, but I could say as much to you. Nancy and I are grateful for the opportunity you gave us to serve.

One of the things about the presidency is that you're always somewhat apart. You spend a lot of time going by too fast in a car someone else is driving, and seeing the people through tinted glass – the parents holding up a child, and the wave you saw too late and couldn't return. And so many times



President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy smile and wave from a limousine during the Inaugural Parade in 1981.

## Reagan His Place In History Farewell Address – Continued –

I wanted to stop and reach out from behind the glass, and connect. Well, maybe I can do a little of that tonight.

People ask how I feel about leaving. And the fact is, "parting is such sweet sorrow." The sweet part is California, and the ranch and freedom. The sorrow – the good-byes, of course, and leaving this beautiful place.

You know, down the hall and up the stairs from this office is the part of the White House where the presidents and his family live. There are a few favorite windows I have up there that I like to stand and look out of early in the morning. The view is over the grounds here to the Washington Monument, and then the Mall and the Jefferson Memorial. But on mornings when the humidity is low, you can see past the Jefferson to the river, the Potomac, and the Virginia shore. Someone said that's the view Lincoln had when he saw the smoke rising from the Battle of Bull Run. I see more prosaic things: the grass on the banks, the morning traffic as people mark their way to work, now and then a sailboat on the river.

I've been thinking a bit at that window. I've been reflecting on what the past eight years have meant and mean. And the image that comes to mind like a refrain is a nautical one – a small story about a big ship, and a refugee and a sailor. It was back in the early eighties, at the height of the boat people. And the sailor was hard at work on the carrier Midway, which was patrolling the South China Sea. The sailor, like most American servicemen, was young, smart, and fiercely observant. The crew spied on the horizon a leaky little boat. And crammed inside were refugees from Indochina hoping to get to America. The Midway sent a small launch to bring them to the ship and safety. As the refugees made their way through the choppy seas, one spied the sailor on deck and stood up and called out to him. He yelled, "Hello, American sailor. Hello, freedom man."

A small moment with a big meaning, a moment the sailor, who wrote it in a letter, couldn't get out of his mind. And when I saw it, neither could I. Because that's what it was to be an American in the 1980s. We stood, again, for freedom. I know we always have, but in the past few years the world again, and in a way, we ourselves – rediscovered it.

It's been quite a journey this decade, and we held together through some stormy seas. And at the end, together, we are reaching our destination.

The fact is, from Grenada to the Washington and Moscow summits, from the recession of '81 to '82, to the expansion that began in late '82 and continues to this day, we've made a difference. The way I see it, there were two great triumphs, two things that I'm proudest of. One is the economic recovery, in which the people of America created – and filled –

## Reagan His Place In History Farewell Address – Continued –

19 million new jobs. The other is the recovery of our morale. America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership.

Something that happened to me a few years ago reflects some of this. It was back in 1981, and I was attending my first big economic summit, which was held that year in Canada. The meeting place rotates among the member countries. The opening meeting was a formal dinner for the heads of government of the seven industrialized nations. Now, I sat there like the new kid in school and listened, and it was all the Francois this and Helmut that. They dropped titles and spoke to one another on a first-name basis. Well, at one point I sort of learned in and said, "My name's Ron." Well, in that same year, we began the actions we felt would ignite an economic comeback – cut taxes and regulation, started to cut spending. And soon the recovery began.

Two years later, another economic summit, with pretty much the same cast. At the big opening meeting we all got together, and all of a sudden, just for a moment, I saw that everyone was just sitting there looking at me. And then one of them broke the silence. "Tell us about the American miracle," he said.

Well, back in 1980, when I was running for president, it was all so different. Some pundits said our programs would result in catastrophe. Our views on foreign affairs would cause war. Our plans for the economy would cause inflation to soar and bring about economic collapse. I even remember one highly respected economist saying, back in 1982, that "the engines of economic growth have shut down here, and they're likely to stay that way for years to come." Well, he and the other opinion leaders were wrong. The fact is, what they called "radical" was really "right". What they called "dangerous" was just "desperately needed."

And in all of that time I won a nickname, "The Great Communicator." But I never thought it was my style or the words I used that made a difference: It was the content. I wasn't a great communicator, but I communicated great things, and they didn't spring full bloom from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation – from our experience, our wisdom, and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two centuries. They called it the Reagan revolution. Well, I'll accept that, but for me it always seemed more like the great rediscovery, a rediscovery of our values and our common sense.

Common sense told us that when you put a big tax on something, the people will produce less of it. So, we cut the people's tax rates, and the people produced more than ever before. The economy bloomed like a



## Reagan His Place In History Farewell Address – Continued –

plant that had been cut back and could not grow quicker and stronger. Our economic program brought about the longest peacetime expansion in our history: real family income up, the poverty rate down, entrepreneurship booming, and an explosion in research and new technology. We're exporting more than ever because American industry became more competitive and at the same time, we summoned the national will to knock down protectionist walls abroad instead of erecting them at home. Common sense also told us that to preserve the peace, we'd have to become strong again after years of weakness and confusion. So, we rebuilt our defenses, and this New Year we toasted the new peacefulness around the globe. Not only have the superpowers actually begun to reduce their stockpiles of nuclear weapons – and hope for even more progress is bright – but the regional conflicts that rack the globe are also beginning to cease. The Persian Gulf is no longer a war zone. The Soviets are leaving Afghanistan. The Vietnamese are preparing to pull out of Cambodia, and an American-mediated accord will soon send 50,000 Cuban troops home from Angola.

The lesson of all this was, of course, that because we're a great nation, our challenges seem complex. It will always be this way. But as long as we remember our first principles and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours. And something else we learned: Once you begin a great movement, there's no telling where it will end. We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed a world.

Countries across the globe are turning to free markets and free speech and turning away from the ideologies of the past. For them, the great rediscovery of the 1980s has been that, lo and behold, the moral way of government is the practical way of government: Democracy, the profoundly good, is also profoundly productive.

When you've got to the point when you can celebrate the anniversaries of your 39th birthday, you can sit back sometimes, review your life, and see it flowing before you. For me there was a fork in the river, and it was right in the middle of my life. I never meant to go into politics. It wasn't my intention when I was young. But I was raised to believe you had to pay your way for the blessings bestowed on you. I was happy with my career in the entertainment world, but I ultimately went into politics because I wanted to protect something precious.

Ours was the first revolution in the history of mankind that truly reversed the course of government, and with three little words: "We the people." "We the people" tell the government what to do, it doesn't tell us. "We the people" are the driver, the government is the car. And we decide where it should go, and by what route, and how fast. Almost all the world's

# Reagan His Place In History

## Farewell Address

– Continued –

constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which "We the people" tell the government what it is allowed to do. "We the people" are free. This belief has been the underlying basis for everything I've tried to do these past eight years.

But back in the 1960s, when I began, it seemed to me that we'd begun reversing the order of things – that through more and more rules and regulations and confiscatory taxes, the government was taking more of our money, more of our options, and more of our freedom. I went into politics in part to put up my hand and say, "Stop." I was a citizen politician, and it seemed the right thing for a citizen to do.

I think we have stopped a lot of what needed stopping. And I hope we have once again reminded the people that man is not free unless government is limited. There's a clear cause and effect here that is as neat and predictable as a law of physics: As government expands, liberty contracts.

Nothing is less free than pure communism, and yet we have, the past few years, forged a satisfying new closeness with the Soviet Union. I've been asked if this isn't a gamble, and my answer is no because we're basing our actions not on words but deeds. The detente of the 1970s was based not on actions but promises. They'd promise to treat their own people and the people of the world better. But the gulag was still the gulag, and the state was still expansionist, and they still waged proxy wars in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Well, this time, so far, it's different. President Gorbachev has brought about some internal democratic reforms and begun the withdrawal from Afghanistan. He has also freed prisoners whose names I've given him every time we've met.

But life has a way of reminding you of big things through small incidents. Once, during the heady days of the Moscow summit, Nancy and I decided to break off from the entourage one afternoon to visit the



President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev hold one-on-one discussions to improve U.S. and Soviet relations.

## Reagan His Place In History Farewell Address – Continued –

shops on Arbat Street – that’s a little street just off Moscow’s main shopping area. Even though our visit was a surprise, every Russian there immediately recognized us and called out our names and reached for our hands. We were just about swept away by the warmth. You could almost feel the possibilities in all that joy. But within seconds, a KGB detail pushed their way toward us and began pushing and shoving the people in the crowd. It was an interesting moments. It reminded me that while the man of the street in the Soviet Union yearns for peace, the government is communist. And those who run it are communists, and that means we and they view such issues as freedom and human rights very differently.

We must keep up our guard, but we must also continue to work together to lessen and eliminate tension and mistrust. My view is that President Gorbachev is different from previous Soviet leaders. I think he knows some of the things wrong with his society and is trying to fix them. We wish him well. And we’ll continue to work to make sure that the Soviet Union that eventually emerges from this process is a less threatening one. What it all boils down to is this. I want the new closeness to continue. And it will, as long as we make it clear that we will continue to act in a certain way as long as they continue to act in a helpful manner. If and when they don’t, at first pull your punches. If they persist, pull the plug. It’s still trust, but verify. It’s still play, but cut the cards. It’s still watch closely. And don’t be afraid to see what you see.

I’ve been asked if I have any regrets. Well, I do. The deficit is one. I’ve been talking a great deal about that lately, but tonight isn’t for arguments. And I’m going to hold my tongue. But an observation: I’ve had my share of victories in the Congress, but what few people noticed is that I never won anything you didn’t win for me. They never saw my troops; they never saw Reagan’s regiments, the American people. You won every battle with every call you made and letter you wrote demanding action. Well, action is still needed. If we’re to finish the job, Reagan’s regiments will have to become the Bush brigades. Soon he’ll be the chief, and he’ll need you every bit as much as I did.

Finally, there is a great tradition of warnings in presidential farewells, and I’ve got one that’s been on my mind for some time. But oddly enough it starts with one of the things I’m proudest of in the past eight years: the resurgence of national pride that I called the new patriotism. This national feeling is good, but it won’t count for much, and it won’t last unless it’s grounded in thoughtfulness and knowledge.

An informed patriotism is what we want. And are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the



## Reagan His Place In History Farewell Address – Continued –

long history of the world? Those of us who are over 35 or so years of age grew up in a different America. We were taught, very directly, what it means to be an American. And we absorbed, almost in the air, a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions. If you didn't get these things from your family, you got them from the neighborhood, from the father down the street who fought in Korea or the family who lost someone at Anzio. Or you could get a sense of patriotism from school. And if all else failed, you could get a sense of patriotism from the popular culture. The movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special. TV was like that, too, through the mid-sixties.

But now, we're about to enter the nineties, and some things have changed. Younger parents aren't sure that an unambivalent appreciation of America is the right thing to teach modern children. And as for those who create the popular culture, well-grounded patriotism is no longer the style. Our spirit is back, but we haven't reinstitutionalized it. We've got to do a better job of getting across that America is freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare. It's fragile; it needs production [protection].

So, we've got to teach history based not on what's in fashion but what's important: Why the Pilgrims came here, who Jimmy Doolittle was, and what those 30 seconds over Tokyo meant. You know, four years ago on the 40th anniversary of D-day, I read a letter from a young woman writing of her late father, who'd fought on Omaha Beach. Her name was Lisa Zanatta Henn, and she said, "We will always remember, we will never forget what the boys of Normandy did."

Well, let's help her keep her word. If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are. I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let's start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual. And let me offer lesson number one about America: All great change in America begins at the dinner table. So, tomorrow night in the kitchen I hope the talking begins. And children, if your parents haven't been teaching you what it means to be an American, let 'em know and nail 'em on it. That would be a very American thing to do.

And that's about all I have to say tonight. Except for one thing. The past few days when I've been at that window upstairs, I've thought a bit of the "shining city upon a hill." The phrase comes from John Winthrop, who wrote it to describe the America he imagined. What he imagined was important because he was an early Pilgrim, an early freedom man. He journeyed here on what today we'd call a little wooden boat; and like the

# Reagan His Place In History

## Farewell Address

– Continued –

other Pilgrims, he was looking for a home that would be free.

I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind swept, God blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors, and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.

And how stands the city on this winter night? More prosperous, more secure, and happier than it was eight years ago. But more than that; after 200 years – two centuries – she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm. And she's still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.

We've done our part. And as I walk off into the city streets, a final word to the men and women of the Reagan revolution, the men and women across America who for eight years did the work that brought America back. My friends, we did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference. We made the city stronger. We made the city freer, and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad, not bad at all.

My friends, we did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference. We made the city stronger. We made the city freer, and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad, not bad at all.

And so, good-bye, God bless you, and  
God bless the United States of America. ☒

### Audio Clip of Address

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKVsq2daR8Q>

*President Ronald Reagan's Farewell Address,  
Delivered January 11, 1989  
in Washington, D.C.*



# Reagan His Place In History

## Historians Discuss Reagan's Legacy

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/remember/jan-june04/historians\\_06-07.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/remember/jan-june04/historians_06-07.html)



Gwen Ifill



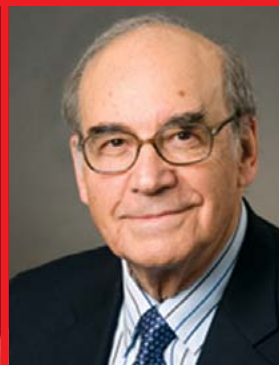
Richard Norton Smith



Michael Beschloss



Roger Wilkins



Haynes Johnson

## Historians Discuss Reagan's Legacy

PBS NewsHour

AIR DATE: June 7, 2004

**GWEN IFILL:** *Gwendolyn L. "Gwen" Ifill is an American journalist, television newscaster and author. She is the managing editor and moderator of Washington Week and a senior correspondent for the PBS NewsHour, both of which air on PBS.*

Ronald Reagan was the oldest man ever to serve as president, the longest-living ex-president, and the first American president to serve two full terms since Dwight David Eisenhower.

We look at the legacy of those years with presidential historians Michael Beschloss and Richard Norton Smith, director of the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum; journalist and author Haynes Johnson; and Roger Wilkins, professor of history at George Mason University.

Richard, what would you say would be the most enduring feature of Ronald Reagan's legacy?

**RICHARD NORTON SMITH:** *Richard Norton Smith is an American historian and author specializing in U.S. presidents.*

Well, everyone this weekend has talked about winning the Cold War; that will be part of the historical debate, that certainly is an enormous part of the legacy. Let me suggest

something that people haven't talked about very much.

He really probably more than any president since FDR transformed the political landscape, and that's not easy to do. FDR shattered the political consensus that he found in place in 1933, and he left behind a new consensus and an army of followers who for 50 years really defined American politics. And Ronald Reagan really followed in his footsteps, even if they charted a different course.

American conservatism before Ronald Reagan, conservatives were people who were fighting a rear guard against the 20th century. They invited caricature; they were overfed men in bat wing collars and little old ladies in tennis shoes who worried about fluoridation in their water. Ronald Reagan not only put a smile on the face of conservatism, his conservatism was not only optimistic, it was futuristic.

And that I think is an enormous part of his legacy, one that is still unfolding and, don't forget, there's a whole generation of young people who came of age during the Reagan years, many of whom are in this White House, others in all other sorts of fields, so the Reagan legacy marches on into the 21st century.

## Reagan His Place In History Historians Discuss Reagan's Legacy – Continued –

**GWEN IFILL:** Michael, if you use Richard's term of the new consensus that was formed, does that constitute the Reagan Revolution we hear about, and if it does, how would that manifest itself in policy?

**MICHAEL BESCHLOSS:** *Michael Richard Beschloss is an American historian. A specialist in the United States presidency, he is the author of nine books.*

It does a little bit, although, you know, a large part of the Reagan Revolution was reduce the size of government. Reagan couldn't do it, nor could any later president, nor could any Republican today who might run now or in four years, so it didn't quite happen.

At the same time Richard is right in terms of there are certain things now that are centrist that 25 years ago were conservative. Bill Clinton who was a Great Society liberal when he started out was the one in 1996 who said the era of big government is over, and also signed a welfare bill that was anything but liberal.

He did that because the consensus had moved, he was afraid not to. He wanted to run for reelection. And the other thing that Reagan did that I think did buck this is one test of a leader is if he or she creates an institution that carries on his or her ideas after they leave the stage. The Republican Party in 1980 was moderate and even liberal enough so that the elder George Bush almost got that nomination in 1980, he was a moderate from the Northeast.

Nowadays, the Republican Party is 90 to 100 percent a Ronald Reagan party, conservative southwestern, and also very religious. He changed it, and it is in a way an engine of Reaganism that carries that on.

**GWEN IFILL:** Roger, let's talk about his domestic policy. Pick up where Michael left off and say how did this Reaganism translate into domestic policy in a way that still reverberates today.

**ROGER WILKINS:** Well, Reagan was an incredible combination of a person who was very optimistic, upbeat, but underneath there were some really ugly parts of his politics.

He was, I said once before on this program, he

capitalized on anti-black populism by going to Philadelphia and Mississippi, for example, in the beginning of his campaign in 1980.

Nobody had ever heard of Philadelphia and Mississippi outside of Mississippi, except as the place where three civil rights workers had been lynched – in 1964 – he said I believe in states rights.

Everybody knew what that meant. He went to Stone Mountain, Georgia, where the Ku Klux Klan used to burn its crosses, and he said Jefferson Davis is a hero of mine.

He was rebuked by the Atlanta newspapers – they said we don't need that any more here. He went to Charlotte, North Carolina one of the most successful busing for integration programs in the country and he said I'm against busing and again the Charlotte papers rebuked him. And the impact of that plus his attacks on welfare women, welfare queens in Cadillacs, for example. And his call for cutting the government. He didn't cut the government; the military bloomed in his time. But programs for poor people day diminished entirely and America became a less civilized and less decent place.

**GWEN IFILL:** Haynes, how does the Ronald Reagan that Roger is describing here conflate with the Ronald Reagan we've been reading and hearing about for the past 48 hours, the man who brought down the Berlin Wall, the man who brought freedom to the world?

**HAYNES JOHNSON:** *Haynes Bonner Johnson (July 9, 1931 – May 24, 2013) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, best-selling author, and TV analyst. He reported on most of the major news stories of the latter half of the 20th century and was widely regarded as one of the top American political commentators.*

That's the wonderful question about Ronald Reagan. What we're watching here on the screen, you see these pictures, the wonderful pictures in our head, this ebullient, happy, confident man.

I think his greatest legacy, I agree he changed the conservative policies of the country, he made a difference in our politics that no one has done since Roosevelt, all that's true, and there are differences in policies, domestic and foreign.



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But the ability as a leader to stamp himself on the consciousness of the country, and bend history to his will – Reagan did that – I happen to think a lot of policies by my view were wrong, whatever that's worth, but he did it.

He was right when he said a minute ago, you showed up clip, we made a difference. And we did it -- he did do that. And that's a very rare thing in our lifetime to see presidents come in and through the power of his personality, persona, and good luck too, a bad period of history, a lot of gloomy things that had happened, the taking of the hostages, 21 percent on the inflation rate and all that, Watergate ... then he comes in and promises, we're going to be great again.

And he was able to convince the country and that's why I think a lot of what we're seeing now is a response to that picture of Ronald Reagan, the ebullient, happy, care-free elegant not cocky but always waiting smiling, and that enabled him to get the policies, which made him very extreme, through the Congress, a Democratic Congress at the time, and even lasting today.

**GWEN IFILL:** And, Richard, interestingly enough, this president's legacy also encompasses his ability to deal with the leaders of a nation once called an evil empire and later embraced Mikhail Gorbachev and glasnost became sort of the definition of a success in Ronald Reagan's time. You work out for us how those two things come together.

**RICHARD NORTON SMITH:** Again, to pick up on what Haynes said, this is part of the great, the elusiveness, the surprising quality of Reagan, because Reagan made his own journey -- everyone expected Reagan, the ultimate old Cold Warrior in 1981. And in fact for much of his first term relations between and the United States and the Soviet Union were absolutely frozen.

And yet the second term, again, the popular notion is that the Reagan second term was pretty rocky, arguably, it was in rocky in some ways historically; however, the greater accomplishments surrounding the IMF Treaty, and in fact the reversal of the Cold War but remember Ronald Reagan was the most unconventional political

figure of his time. Most politicians are incrementalists; they think in baby steps. Ronald Reagan tended to leap frog the conventional wisdom and he did --

**GWEN IFILL:** If I may jump in there -- for instance, being the former union leader who managed to fire the union members in the Air Traffic Controllers strike.

**RICHARD NORTON SMITH:** Which actually had a significant impact, believe it or not, on arms control because it delivered a message after the drift of the 70's that this was a man who behind the velvet, behind the charm, behind the honeyed words, there were absolute steel and when he said he would do something, no whatever the risk, the boldness involved, he probably would do it. And that sent a very powerful signal to Moscow that reverberated years later.

**GWEN IFILL:** But, Michael, you pointed out a moment ago that the President -- one of the things President Reagan promised to do was to shrink the size of government. Yet, the Defense Department doubled during this time and there were huge deficits which were part of that legacy.

**MICHAEL BESCHLOSS:** Sure did, and that's one of the things that history does, because the deficits were a big problem at the time, he was justly criticized but much later we've got to sort of make decisions, was this the right thing, and increasingly it is very possible that that defense spending which caused those deficits may have been necessary to send a message to Moscow that Reagan was serious, the Soviets could not hope to compete with us so, if those deficits brought about the end of the Cold War, historically they were probably justified.

The other thing, I disagree a little bit with Richard in terms of saying that Reagan changed on the Soviet Union. I think he was totally consistent because you go back to 1979 and 1980, what he was saying was we have to demonstrate will of the Soviets.

Once we do that, they'll have new leadership, it comes to us with concessions, that's exactly what happened with Mikhail Gorbachev, so essentially he was just

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accepting to some extent Gorbachev's surrender.

**GWEN IFILL:** Were tax cuts an important part of his legacy, Roger?

**ROGER WILKINS:** *Roger Wilkins is an African-American civil rights leader, professor of history, and journalist.*

Well, they're than enormous part of his legacy. Remember -- I don't know whether it was O'Neil or Woodward who quotes Dick Cheney as saying Reagan taught us that deficits don't count. And it became almost a theological part of the Republican program.

**GWEN IFILL:** And it remains such?

**ROGER WILKINS:** That's right. To cut taxes and what it has done, you know, Brandeis once said that taxes are what we pay for civilization, and when we cut taxes, generally what we do, we don't cut military, we cut programs for poor people. And so you increase the misery in the country and that's part of the legacy.

**HAYNES JOHNSON:** Of course, one of the myths of this is that yes he believed in cutting taxes passionately, no question about that; believed in fighting communism and all that, and shrinking the size of government.

Government didn't, it increased 7 percent or something like -- actual employment of the government in those years.

He did cut the taxes and he had to sign 13 tax increases but they were never called tax increases; they were revenue enhancers. The money raised up and so forth, and he got away with it.

**ROGER WILKINS:** And he believed it.

**HAYNES JOHNSON:** And believed it because of the persona of the man and also the country was in moving well and finally the Cold War was over.

**ROGER WILKINS:** He said those, he believed those things and the American people could see he believed what he said and they liked it.

**GWEN IFILL:** Richard, you want to jump in on this?

**RICHARD NORTON SMITH:** I was going to say, one of the paradox else of this paradoxical man, the only professional actor to ever occupy the Oval Office was remembered by most Americans for an authenticity. Even his gaffs tended to contribute to the sense that this man was real. He went into politics had he was 55 years old, they sense that he went into politician because of ideas, because of things he believed, not because he needed to be president or because he needed an office for his ego, and I think that contributed in no small measure to the bond that he had, even with people who disagreed his ideas.

**GWEN IFILL:** So if the president, said, Michael, for instance, that vis-à-vis Iran Contra, that he believed in his heart one thing but the facts show otherwise, that was something that people were willing to accept?

**MICHAEL BESCHLOSS:** That's exactly it, because here is the biggest trouble spot in the Reagan presidency. He was in danger of impeachment in 1986, there was a suggestion that he had knowingly ordered the diversion of funds from the Nicaraguan contras, which would have been against the law, and because of that bond with the people, the committee on Capitol Hill took impeachment off the table at the beginning of the investigations, they essentially said among themselves, we like President Reagan, we don't want him to fail, the country has been through Vietnam, Watergate, a lot of other failed presidents -- we don't want to do that. And also Americans when they heard him go on television and say in my heart I don't believe I traded arms for hostages, but the facts tell me so, I'm sorry, I'll never do it again, that ended it, it shows how important it is for a president to have though that kind of appeal.

**GWEN IFILL:** Does that mean, Roger, that he was a creature of his time uniquely?

**ROGER WILKINS:** He was a creature of himself, because he did all of these things, you can tell I didn't like his policies at all. But I had contact with him, and I would tell him I disagree with those policies and he would be so genuine, he would say we can work this out.

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**GWEN IFILL:** Did you ever work it out?

**ROGER WILKINS:** Of course not. But --

**MICHAEL BESCHLOSS:** They don't even try nowadays.

**ROGER WILKINS:** But you couldn't walk away saying that is a hateful human being. You say I hate those policies, and that was a large part of his success.

**HAYNES JOHNSON:** One of the things on the clip you showed earlier the scene of Ronald Reagan giving the speech and the pajamas -- the two people behind him, I don't remember them doing this at all, is Tip O'Neill and George Bush, and they're laughing, their political rivals, that's why he got away with it, they liked it; they enjoyed him. The Democrats liked him and even the liberals, they thought he was a doddering old fool, but they liked him. There wasn't a sense of hatred for him.

**GWEN IFILL:** Richard, was he a creature of his time?

**RICHARD NORTON SMITH:** I think he transcended his time. He was both a traditionalist, someone who for millions of people who felt that our culture was adrift

-- embodied what we call traditional values -- but he was also a visionary; he was a man, you had a sense he couldn't wait to get to the 21st century just to see all of his belief in the future confirmed.

**GWEN IFILL:** (It says Michael Beschloss on the website, but I think this question was posed by Ifill): Let's go back where we started. Michael, was this a revolution that he left behind?

**MICHAEL BESCHLOSS:** Revolution, I think that's too strong a word, but he did change things in a big way. He wanted to end the Cold War on his time and do it by a very controversial program of increasing defense spending, challenging the Soviets, it worked -- whether it was entirely his doing or not, historians will argue for years. And he also wanted to make the same more conservative country and his party a more conservative, he did that too -- both of those things in 1980 most people would have thought almost impossible.

**GWEN IFILL:** Michael Beschloss, Roger Wilkins, Haynes Johnson and Richard Norton Smith, thank you all very much. ❧



# Reagan His Place In History

## Official Portrait Of President Reagan

### 1981

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/photographs/official.html>





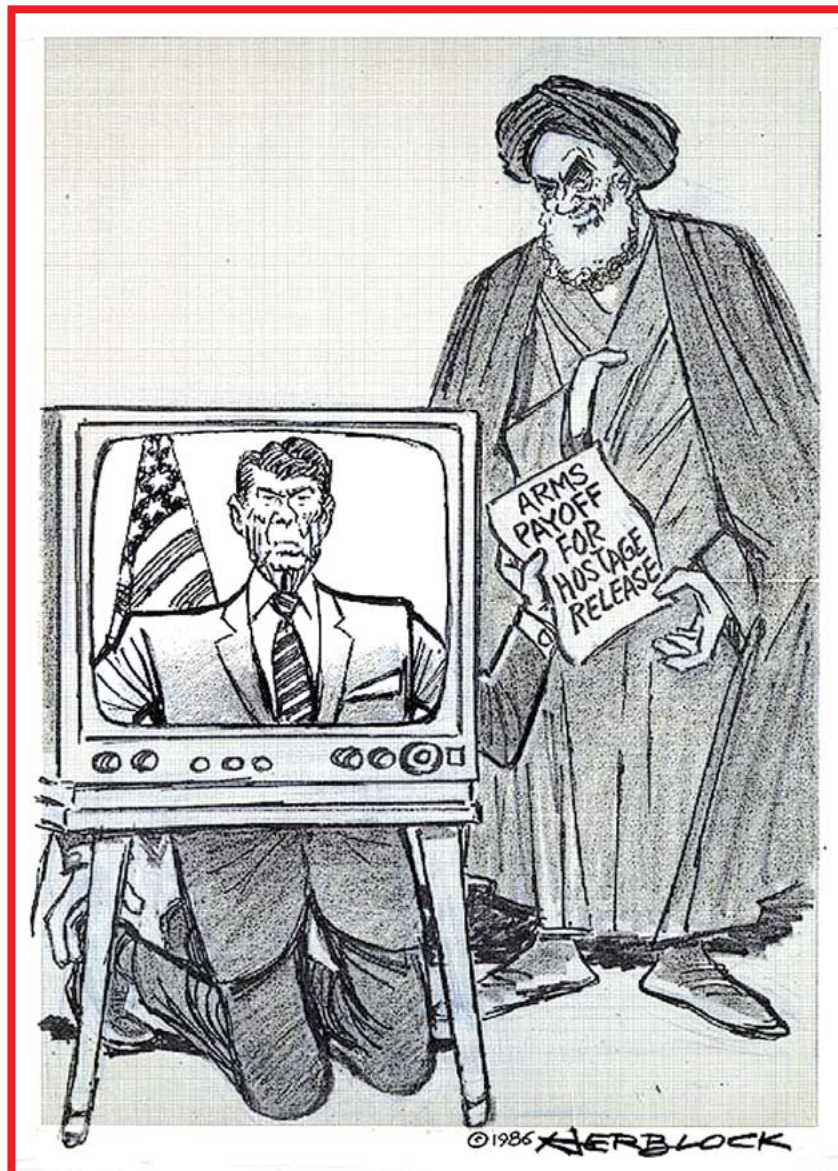
# Reagan His Place In History Set Of Herb Block Political Cartoons

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/invasion.html>

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/enduringoutrage/extremism/ExhibitObjects/IfTheydThoughtOfIt.aspx>

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/herblock/JoyToTheWorld/ExhibitObjects/StrangeHowSome.aspx>

## Arms Pay Off For Hostage Release



**Description:** On November 2, 1986, an American hostage was released by an Iranian group that had held him captive for more than seventeen months. It was soon reported that his release was linked to a transfer of military spare parts to Iran. President Ronald Reagan commented that such a story “has no foundation” and “is making it more difficult to get the other hostages out.” Herb Block comments, “But the story was true,

and the trading of arms actually provided an incentive for the taking of more hostages. Appearing on television, Reagan said forcefully, ‘We did not, repeat not, trade weapons or anything else for hostages.’ When this was proven to be untrue, he later made a carefully worded retraction. He left it to Attorney General Meese to disclose the diversion of arms-sales funds to Nicaraguan contra rebels, a violation of an act of Congress.”

## Reagan His Place In History Set Of Herb Block Political Cartoons – Continued –

The Founders Would Have Loved It If They'd Thought of It

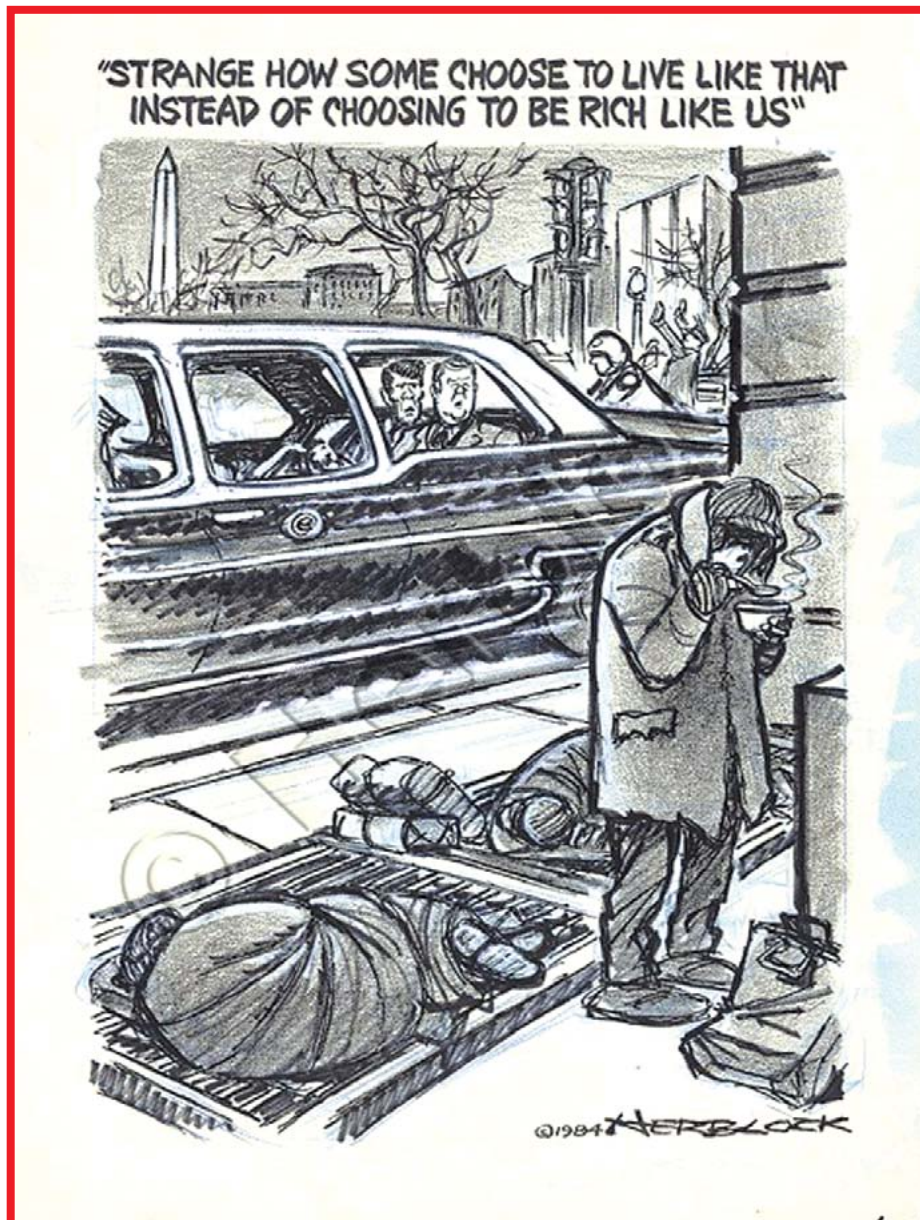


**Description:** By altering the U.S. flag with a cross of stars, Herb Block highlighted the debate about the meaning of the founding fathers' belief on the separation of church and state. By placing the presidential portrait next to the cross of stars, Herb Block underscored the friendly relations between President Ronald Reagan and the religious right during his second term of office.



## Reagan His Place In History Set Of Herb Block Political Cartoons – Continued –

Strange How Some Choose to Live Like That  
Instead of Choosing to Be Rich Like Us



**Description:** Depicting President Ronald Reagan and counselor Edwin Meese riding in a limousine, Herblock castigates the disregard and insensitivity Reagan had expressed the day before in an interview regarding the disastrous impact of his economic policies on the nation's homeless and poor. Large tax cuts for the wealthy and major cuts in government-funded social programs formed the basis of "Reaganomics," or supply-side economics. Herblock gives visible form to the acute deprivation resulting from policies favoring the "well supplied."