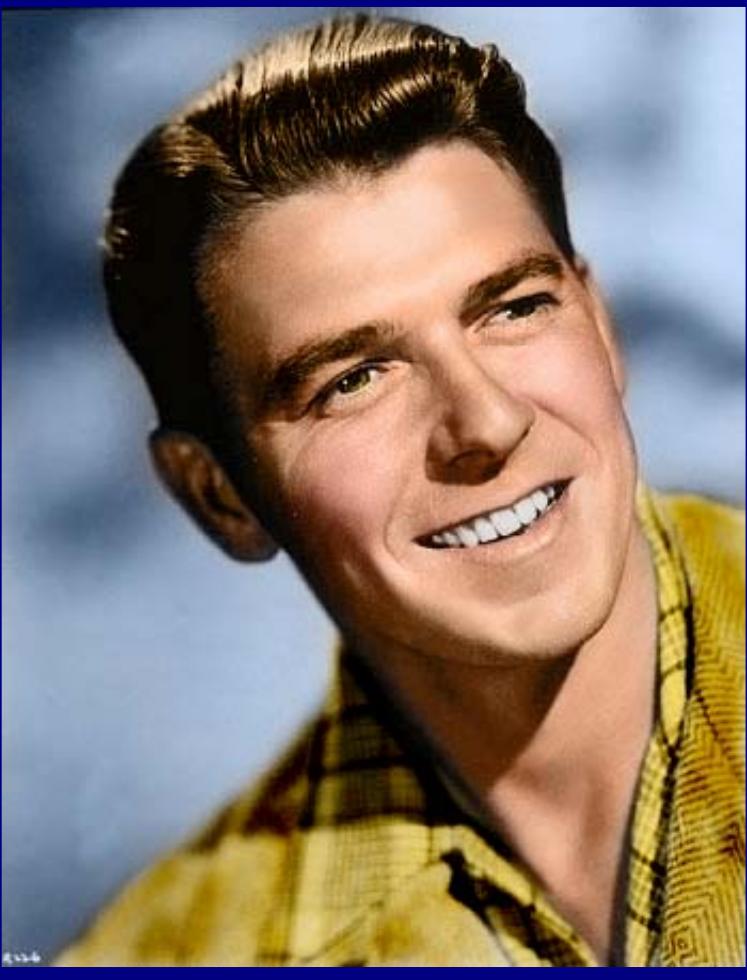


**THE**

*Nick Zegarac's*

*Hollywood*

**ART**



**RONALD WILSON REAGAN**

# Celebrating the life and legacy of **RONALD WILSON REAGAN**

*“He took an America suffering from ‘malaise’... and made its citizens believe again in their destiny.”*

- Edwin Feulner, President of the Heritage Foundation

It is a fair assessment that were it not for Ronald Reagan's other career as commander and chief his film legacy might have gone largely unnoticed in the annals of Hollywood history. For although Ronald Reagan was an amiable leading man during Hollywood's golden age, who occasionally displayed the hallmarks of an exceptional acting prowess, and, in some very important starring roles in A-list movies (**Knute Rockne: All American**, **The Winning Team**, **Kings Row** **The Hasty Heart** and **Storm Warning** among them), Reagan's tenure in films was made brief by studio shortsightedness - more so than from a general lack of either talent or will to succeed.

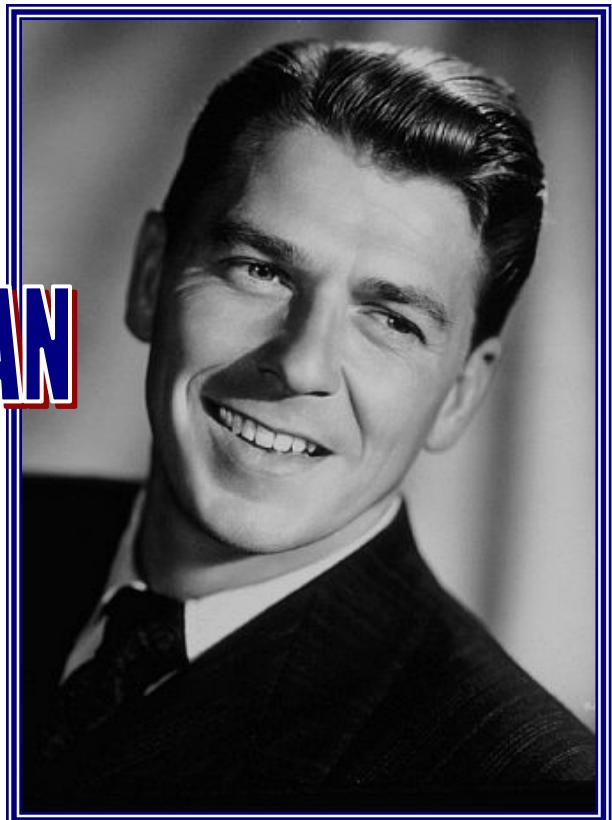
Realistically, today Ronald Wilson Reagan is readily remembered as the beloved 40<sup>th</sup> President of the United States; an inspired leader with an indomitable 'can-do' spirit: and this is as it should be.

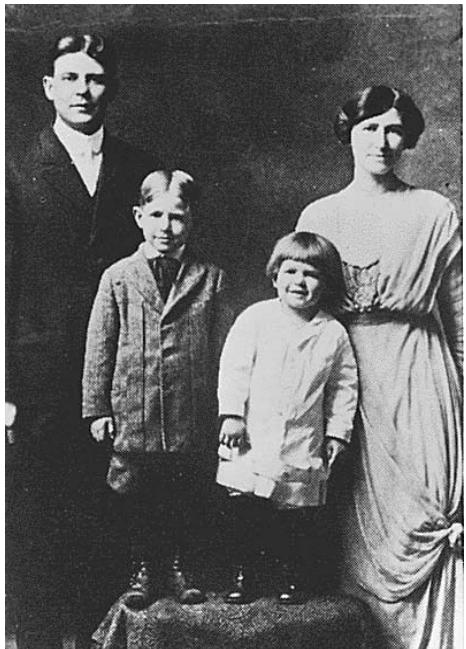
What made the Reagan Presidency so indelible was that Reagan's causes seemed to intently focus on the plight of each and every American. Even Reagan's most ardent detractors in the political arena were, at one time or another genuinely moved into offering a kind word or even impassioned praise after one of his moving speeches.

Reagan's politics crossed party lines. It inspired. It instilled a sense of value, not only in the office of the President, but in the country's self worth and image and its' importance as a progressive super power on the world stage. Reagan's America was all about pride.

In recent months, the media has resurrected many a Reagan-ism to brighten the hour of the latest race for the White House. Growing up, I recall how we all looked forward with waited anticipation to the nuggets of wisdom from Ronald Reagan.

(Top: A Warner Bros. publicity head shot circa 1942 with that trademark smile projecting volumes of humility and spirit. Middle: a beefcake snapshot from the same vintage. In an age of affection for Hollywood he-men, Reagan's athletic persona wasn't merely for show. He lived it. Bottom: fielding questions with gusto from the press in 1983.)





**Reagan: the early years.** Above left (from left to right): Reagan's father, Jack, Ronald, his brother Neil and their mother Nelle 1916. Middle top: Reagan and Jack from the same vintage. Middle bottom: showing an early predilection for sports at Eureka College, 1928. Top, far right: in Dixon Illinois in 1920. Right: a formal photograph taken in 1934. Bottom: a still to promote Warner Bros. release of Knute Rockne: All American 1940. Though Reagan was not the star of the film, he made a winning impression on audiences, his declaration of "Win one for the Gipper!" becoming the film's quotable tag line.)

These nuggets often took on the form of a story conveyed with a wit, charm, an actor's gift for memorization and a healthy dose of frank honesty; lengthy excursions perhaps, though never anything less than thoroughly engrossing to listen to.

Almost from his inaugural in 1981, Reagan's presidency had momentum, optimism, prominence and distinction. Reagan's was the personification of hard-headed determinism married to an imperishable and alluring sway – hypnotic and thoroughly beguiling. Reagan's rapport with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher remains one of the all time great Anglo-American alliances of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While many of Reagan's predecessors had adopted various façades to meet the changing political landscape they oversaw, Ronald Reagan engaged each new challenge with only one face; open, accepting, friendly, even tolerant of the media's scrutiny and ridicule; yet granite-like and firm when pushed to reconsider any of the ideals he held strongly.

Reagan was not a sentimentalist, though at times when America needed to let its collective hair down – as in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster – Reagan could move his audience to the brink of a good heartfelt cry and then, just as easily, rally his people to stirring calls of cheer and a look to the future – with a wink, a smile and his personal renewal of a promise made and as yet unfulfilled; that America's best days lay ahead of her.

In our memory then, Ronald Reagan has not aged. It is, of course, an illusion of the mind, for the man is no more. But Reagan gave us the



impression that the sun would never entirely set on his time. Arguably, it never has. He remains one of the distinctly American, truly iconic figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; ensconced in our collective hearts and minds as eternal.

Hence, we have to remind ourselves that Ronald Reagan is gone. For in his thought, word and deed, Ronald Wilson Reagan left behind much more than a Presidential legacy. He gave America back its dream; a blueprint for the prosperity of a nation. While he lived, he provided guidance and wisdom in ample doses of Teflon-coated ideology. He stood tall and proud; and in the years since his presidency it is this seemingly intangible legacy of intrinsic values that remains the primary reason why Ronald Reagan – the man – endures.



## LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING...

*“Democracy is worth dying for because it’s the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man.”*

– Ronald Reagan

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born above a bank in Tampico, Illinois on February 6, 1911. Reagan's father Jack nicknamed him 'Dutch' in reference to his 'fat little Dutchman-like appearance. In his youth, Reagan's family briefly lived in Monmouth, Galesburg and Chicago; though it was the family's move to Dixon that made the most lasting impression on young Reagan.

At Dixon High School, Reagan indulged in acting and sports; acquiring a job as a lifeguard at Lowell Park in 1926. After high school, Reagan attended Eureka College where he majored in economics and sociology and also played football.

In 1932, Reagan landed his first job as a small town radio broadcaster for the University of Iowa football games; rating \$10 per game. A full time staff announcer's job at WOC radio station in Davenport hiked his pay to \$100 a month. But in 1937, while traveling to cover a football game in California, Reagan took a screen test that instantly led to his being offered a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers.

(Top: broadcasting in Des Moines Iowa between 1934-37 and loving every minute of it. Middle: as a lieutenant, posing with his proud mother, Nelle sometime in the 1940s. Bottom: as an honorary fireman, with Nelle during 1950s Injun Summer Days in Dixon. Though he was hardly a publicity seeker, Reagan's wide open smile and honest charm were undoubtedly tailor-made for the camera.)





(Above and right: three views of Reagan as Alec Hamm, dubbed 'that loveable parasite' by Ann (Geraldine Fitzgerald) but who proves his loyalty to the fatally stricken Judy Traherne (Bette Davis) by reuniting her at the last possible moment with her true love, Dr. Steele (George Brent). Below: in full battle dress as football legend George Gipp for Knute Rockne: All American 1940).

His first screen credit was the starring role in the undistinguished **Love Is on the Air** (1937). Though studio president, Jack L. Warner had a lot of faith in his new acquisition, Reagan's early tenure at the studio was largely forgettable. He was unaccredited as a radio announcer in **Hollywood Hotel** (1937).

On April 29<sup>th</sup> of that same year, Reagan completed a home-study Army Extension Course and enlisted in the Reserves. He was assigned as a private to Troop B, 322nd Cavalry at Des Moines, Iowa, then appointed Second Lieutenant in the Officers' Reserve Corps on May 25, and later assigned to the 323rd Cavalry on June 18<sup>th</sup>.

Warner Bros. recalled Reagan to their stable to star in one of the worst movies ever produced at the studio; 1938's **Swing Your Lady** – a backwoods hillbilly musical that ironically also featured Humphrey Bogart. 1938 distinguished itself in another way for Reagan. On the set of **Brother Rat**, Reagan fell in love with his costar Jane Wyman.

Fan magazines dubbed it a love match and Reagan next appeared in support of Bette Davis in **Dark Victory**, a considerable effort in which he played Alec Hamm; a drunken ever-faithful friend to Davis' Judith Traherne. In 1940, Reagan had his best role to date as ill-stricken George Gipp in **Knute Rockne: All American**. To inaugurate the year, Reagan married Wyman on January 26, 1940.



Reagan's first attempt at functioning as something more than an actor within the Hollywood social structure came in 1941 when he was elected to the Board of Directors of the Screen Actor's Guild as an alternate. That same year, Reagan's eldest daughter Maureen was born.

As the war in Europe heated up, Reagan was ordered to active duty on April 18, 1942. Unfortunately, his nearsightedness classified him for limited service at Fort Mason, California as a liaison officer of the Port and Transportation Office.

Upon approval from the Army Air Force, Reagan was assigned Public Relations duties in the First Motion Picture Unit in Culver City, California. The move afforded Reagan the opportunity to serve his country while he continued making movies for his Hollywood bosses.

By far, Reagan's most gripping performance to date came in **Kings Row** (1942); a poignantly dark and brooding melodrama about small town hypocrisy. He plays wealthy playboy, Drake McHugh, whose affair with Louise Gordon (Nancy Coleman) is objected to by her father; the sadist/Doctor Henry Gordon (Charles Coburn).

After Drake's fortunes are liquidated, Drake falls on the mercy of his longtime friend, Randy Monaghan (Ann Sheridan); a poor girl who, with the help of her father, gets Drake a job working the railroad. As a quiet understanding and, later, romance develops between Randy and Drake, Louise falls into a deep state of melancholy.

An unfortunate accident leads to the summoning of Doctor Gordon to tend to Drake's wounds. However, presuming that his own daughter could never love an invalid, Gordon deliberately and needlessly amputates both of Drake's legs – sending him into an immediate and deepening depression.

Reagan always considered his performance in **Kings Row** to be his finest and reflected viewing of this film certainly bears out his assessment. There is a startling clarity to Drake's transformation from amiable man about town to dissolute recluse; the resurrection of his spirit at the end of the film, with the aid of friend Parris Mitchell (Robert Cummings), in hindsight, a rousing glimpse into the eternally optimistic spirit Reagan would bring to his future calling in the political arena.

(Top: With Wyman, in love with the idea of being in love. Reagan would later admit of his first failed marriage, "She didn't want me." Middle: Drake McHugh (Reagan) introduces Randy Monaghan (Ann Sheridan) to Parris Mitchell (Robert Cummings) in **Kings Row** 1942. Although it's originally Drake's ambition to pair the two together, Randy becomes his girl instead after a disastrous accident. Bottom: Drake in tortured lament over the loss of his legs with an attentive Randy at his side.)





(Above: the one that was built to last and the 'real winning team.' Reagan met contract player Nancy Davis in 1949 and married her three years later. Their genuine affection for one another has not been equaled in the White House since. Top left: a couple's photo op taken in January 1952 after their announced engagement. Middle: cutting the cake in Toluca Lake CA on March 4, 1952. Top right: sharing a laugh on the set of *Donovan's Brain* 1953.

Right: empathetic to and confrontational with stubborn Lachie MacLachlan (Richard Todd) as the outspoken 'Yank' in *The Hasty Heart* 1949. The melodrama stems from the fact that Lachie does not know he is going to die.)

For now, Reagan contented himself with a series of forgettable roles in subsequent Warner product. A bright spot was his casting as Johnny Jones in Irving Berlin's blindingly all-star tribute to the Armed Forces; **This Is The Army** (1943). In January 1944, Captain Reagan was ordered to temporary duty in New York City; a tenure that lasted until he was reassigned to Fort MacArthur in California on December 9, 1945.

By war's end, and despite his lack of active duty, Reagan could be proud of the fact that he had produced over 400 training films for the army. On the home front, the Reagan's welcomed the prospect of a second child. It would be the last happy news for their marriage.

Reagan became the Screen Actor's Guild's (SAG) third Vice President in 1946 and its' elected President in 1947. That same year however, a second daughter Christine was born and died on June 26, 1947. Although the stigma of this loss was slightly eased by the adoption of a son, Michael that same year (Michael was actually born in 1945) Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman divorced one year later on June 28, 1948.





(Top left: a farewell group photo from *The Hasty Heart*. Top right and middle row: as baseball legend Grover Cleveland Alexander with wife, Aimee (Doris Day). Unusual for a film of this vintage, it explores Cleveland's fall from grace, his exile into deep depression and his ultimate resurrection as one of the most famous pitchers ever to play in the Major Leagues. Bottom: figuring things out for himself as inquisitive attorney, Burt Rainey in *Storm Warning*. At bottom right is Ginger Rogers as Martha Mitchell – a fashion model who has come to the small town to visit her sister, Lucy (Doris Day) only to realize she has married a murderer.)



During Reagan's SAG tenure and following his divorce from Wyman, he threw himself into work almost entirely, overseeing and bringing about resolutions to labor-management disputes within the film industry and also contributing to the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) hearings.

In 1949 Reagan delivered one of his best performances as the compassionate soldier of war – 'Yank' in **The Hasty Heart**. Though this film was ultimately a showcase for Richard Todd, Reagan's presence distinguished itself in a sentimental and memorable story.

The year was also marked by a most fortuitous chance meeting between Reagan and MGM contract actress Nancy Davis. She had been mistaken for another Nancy Davis who was suspected of being a communist. As such, her name had been added to the McCarthy blacklist.

In his role as SAG's President, Reagan helped to resolve this snafu for Davis and the two became immediate friends. "*I don't know if it was love at first sight*," Nancy would later muse, "*But it was pretty close.*" In March 1952, Nancy Davis became the second Mrs. Ronald Reagan.

The last two remarkable movies in Reagan's tenure were 1951's **Storm Warning** and 1952's **The Winning Team**. In the former, Reagan plays a District Attorney investigating small town racial bigotry and debunking the presence of the KKK – responsible for the murder of a man on a public street. In the latter, Reagan was cast as legendary baseball player, Grover Cleveland Alexander opposite Doris Day.

In between these two films Regan made his one glaring blunder as an actor in the infamously bad **Bedtime for Bonzo** (1951); cast as a Professor who befriends a chimp. It is largely due to the legendary status of this misfire that Democrats were quick to judge Reagan's film career in totem as that of a forgettable B-movie actor.

In response to the allegation, Reagan jokingly replied that in his day "...they (producers) didn't want them good, they wanted them Thursday". However, behind the scenes Reagan often held a bit of regret that his tenure in Hollywood was never again to be taken seriously.

Although Reagan was an early critic of television, the medium proved to be very good for his career in more ways than one. He became the host of **General Electric Theater**; a weekly series that netted him the then plush salary of \$125,000 per year in this role. From 1964 to 1965 Reagan would have a reoccurring role in the popular western series; **Death Valley Days**. But it was another burgeoning side interest that, by the end of the decade, had begun to garner real purpose for Ronald Reagan.



# INTO THE SIDE SHOW

*"I didn't leave the Democratic Party. The party left me."*

## - Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan began his political affiliations as a Roosevelt Democrat, but shifted to Republicanism beginning in the early 1950s, endorsing Presidential candidacies Dwight D. Eisenhower (1952 and 1956) and Richard Nixon (1960). Going as far back as his tenure with General Electric Theater, Reagan had been required to give speeches.

These were frequently conservative in tone and written entirely by Reagan. Hence, and although he would later have speech writers in the White House, Reagan continued to be his own best editor – reshaping and evolving the themes and concepts to suit his own inimitable style and delivery.

In 1964, Reagan campaigned for Barry Goldwater, revealing his own ideologies in a memorable speech on Goldwater's behalf on October 27, 1964. "The Founding Fathers knew a government can't control the economy without controlling people," Reagan reasoned, "...and they knew when a government sets out to do that it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose. So we have come to a time for choosing."

The speech made a decided impression on California Republicans who took it to heart and successfully elected Reagan as their governor in 1966. It was a rocky relationship almost from the start and in hindsight seemed to reflect Reagan's stalwart approach to politics.

(Previous page, top: as a gunslinger in the film 'Hong Kong' 1952. Middle: with Jane Wyman in Brother Rat 1939. Bottom: as the host of television's popular General Electric Theater 1955.)

This page, top: speaking as President at a rally for Sen. Durenburger in Minneapolis 1982. Middle: The Reagans aboard their boat in California in 1964. Bottom: giving the Goldwater speech at the International Hotel in Los Angeles in 1964.)





(Above: the official portrait of the President and his cabinet. Front row: Alexander Haig, Secretary of State; President Reagan; Vice President Bush; Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense. Second row: Raymond Donovan, Secretary of Labor; Donald Regan, Secretary of Labor; Terrel Bell, Secretary of Education; David Stockman, Director, Office of Management & Budget; Andrew Lewis, Secretary of Transportation; Samuel Pierce, Secretary of Housing & Urban Development; William French Smith, Attorney General; James Watt, Secretary of the Interior; Jeane Kirkpatrick, U.S. Representative to the United Nations; Edwin Meese III, Counselor to the President; James Edwards, Secretary of Energy; Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary of Commerce; William E. Brock, United States Trade Representative; Richard Schweiker, Secretary of Health & Human Services; John Block, Secretary of Agriculture; William Casey, Director, Central Intelligence Agency.)

For example; in 1968, Reagan attempted to test the presidential waters himself with disastrous results. He ultimately finished in third place on the Republican ticket. It was a minor embarrassment to Reagan who followed the defeat up with a major misfire at home. In 1969, Reagan called out the Highway Patrol and other law enforcement to Berkeley's university campus to quell student protests. The incident eventually came to be known as 'Bloody Thursday' and forced Berkeley into a state of emergency. After the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped Patty Hearst and demanded the distribution of food to the poor as trade for her release, Reagan jokingly quipped, "*It's just too bad we can't have an epidemic of botulism.*"

In 1970, Reagan was re-elected as Governor of California. Outspoken in support of capital punishment, Reagan's second term in office helped to refine a political platform he would later ride to victory in the White House; advocating less government regulation of the economy and reduced taxation. In 1976, Reagan challenged incumbent President Gerald Ford in a bid to become the Republican Party's candidate for President.

Despite early victories in North Carolina, Texas, and California, Reagan ultimately lost in New Hampshire and Florida and lost the candidacy to Ford. However, in 1980 Reagan effectively defeated incumbent President Jimmy Carter. In his inaugural address to the nation, given in the shadow of 52 hostages being held by Iran, Reagan revealed his promise for the future of America; promises that, by and large and in retrospect, he admirably fulfilled.

*"The business of our nation goes forward," Reagan explained, "...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..."*

*Now, so there will be no misunderstanding, it's 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...*

*We have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say that we're in a time when there are not heroes; they just don't know where to look... Your dreams, your hopes, your goals are going to be the dreams, the hopes, and the goals of this administration, so help me God...*

*Above all, we must realize that no arsenal or no weapon in the arsenals of the world is as formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women... The crisis we are facing today... 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."*

It was this speech that set the tone for Reagan's presidency; one aggressively pursued in policies that brought about substantial changes to both the domestic and world stage. Reagan's resolve on matters of state never wavered, but his personal resolve was put to a dramatic test of faith on March 30, 1981 when would-be assassin John Hinckley Jr. fired into an open crowd, wounding Reagan in the chest and narrowly missing his heart.

(Top: delivering his 'welcome home' speech for the freed hostages on the south lawn of the White House on Jan. 27, 1981. Middle: pandemonium moments after John Hinckley Jr.'s bullet narrowly missed killing the President. James Brady is on the ground. Bottom: smiling for the cameras inside George Washington University Hospital with Nancy at his side.)





(Above: the ‘other’ winning team of Reagan and Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, seen here on the south lawn of the White House in 1981. Top right: riding with Queen Elizabeth II near Windsor Castle during a trip to England in 1982. In hosting a state dinner at the White House for the Queen in 1983, Reagan made a blunder later erroneously attributed to his Alzheimer’s Disease.

When, after several long moments Reagan noticed that the Queen hesitated to take her place at the dinner table, instead standing closely at his side and thereby necessitating that everyone else remain standing out of respect, Reagan politely attempted to inform Her Majesty of the place settings. “Yes, I know,” the Queen politely replied with a smile, “But you’re standing on my dress.” The situation was quickly rectified.

Above right: a rarity that was cause for celebration; five living Presidents gathered for a group photo in the Oval Office. From left: Presidents Gerald Ford, Richard M. Nixon, George Bush, Reagan and Jimmy Carter.)

Coughing up blood, but maintaining his sense of wit, Reagan was rushed to George Washington University Hospital with a collapsed lung where he jokingly told the attending physicians, “I hope you’re all Republicans!” Though lead surgeon Dr. Joseph Giordano was not, he affectionately replied, “Today, Mr. President, we’re all Republicans.”

Despite the fact that Hinckley’s bullet had seriously injured Reagan, he recovered from this attempt on his life with remarkable speed and was released from the hospital on April 11 – a mere 12 days later. His approval rating shot to 73%.

Immediately following this attempt on his life, Reagan began to show the sort of hard as nails leadership that would eventually brand him a determinist. He made good on a 1980 campaign promise to appoint the first female Supreme Court Justice by nominating Sandra Day O'Connor to fill a vacancy created by the retirement of Justice Potter Stewart.

His critics were quick to attack his plans, but Reagan held firm on virtually all issues that crossed his desk. For example: when the Air Traffic Controllers violated a regulation prohibiting government unions from striking, Reagan ordered the employees back to work within 48hrs or face forfeiture of their tenured positions. It was a test of Presidential will versus union might. Ultimately, Reagan would fire 11,345 air traffic controllers and bust the union for disobeying his direct command.

Another problem immediately facing Reagan's presidency was the economic slump America was in. Reagan's across the board tax cuts – critics dubbed 'Reaganomics' - was responsible for a galvanic reinvigoration of the American economy. His Economic Recovery Tax Act was signed into law in 1981 and revised in 1986. Although the unemployment rate was to peak to a record 10.8% by Christmas of 1982, throughout the rest of Reagan's presidency that figure steadily and significantly dropped.

As a result, sixteen million new jobs were created and inflation plummeted. There remains some debate even today as to the foresight in Reagan's economic stimulus. Pundits have pointed out that Reagan's reduced spending on Medicaid, Federal Education and food stamps benefited the rich and middle classes - not the poor.

There can be little doubt that Reagan viewed America as the land of opportunity. As such, it was the responsibility of the poor to seek out that opportunity and improve their own situations. Reagan sought to purge tens of thousands deemed to be 'milking the system'. But he also was quick to protect entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

To exercise America's renewed supremacy on the world stage, Reagan's 'peace through strength' program generated a record 40% peacetime military buildup by 1985. Once again, the pundits saw this increase as a throwback to over-budgeted military spending that occurred immediately after WWII.

**(Top:** White House portrait taken during Reagan's first term. **Middle:** sharing ideas with Vice President Bush on the colonnade in 1988. **Bottom:** viewing caskets of the fallen in Beirut at Andrews Air Force Base in 1983.)





(Remembrances of very different kinds – top left: decorating the residence Christmas tree in 1983. Bottom left: invigorated to see one another again after a brief separation. Top right: paying their solemn respects at Omaha Beach Cemetery in Normandy France in 1984. Right: reminiscing with fellow Warner Bros. alumni, James Cagney upon his receipt of the Medal of Freedom in 1984. Clearly, the old timers had a lot to laugh about, despite Cagney's fragile condition.)

However, in 1983, 241 American servicemen were murdered by a suicide bomber in Beirut; an act of unprovoked aggression that Reagan publicly called 'despicable' and used to further illustrate the need for increased military spending. Two days after that attack, Reagan ordered U.S. forces to invade Grenada.



Reagan also escalated the Cold War by implementing new policies towards the Soviet Union; reviving the B-1 bomber program and producing the MX Peacekeeper missile. Becoming the first American president ever to address British Parliament, Reagan dubbed the Soviets 'the evil empire' and proudly predicted that Marxism-Leninism would soon become a thing of the past. By the spring of 1983, Reagan had introduced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI); a ground to space-based system that would protect the United States from attack by nuclear ballistic missiles. Opponents dubbed the project 'Star Wars' and argued that it was technological fancy at best. The Soviets, however, particularly leader Yuri Andropov, were thrust into an immediacy of grave concern.

# THE SECOND TIME AROUND

In hindsight, Reagan's second term in office seems almost a given. By 1984 he was a beloved figure in American pop culture; a President to be parodied on *The Tonight Show*, but a man to be taken seriously elsewhere at home and on the world stage. Perhaps it was his actor's training working overtime, but Reagan enjoyed his celebrity with the masses. He also knew how to laugh at himself.

When incumbent Walter Mondale suggested that Reagan's age was a valid precursor to his being considered for a second term in office, Reagan confronted the question head on, but with humorizing. "*I will not make age an issue of this campaign,*" he told his audience during the second Presidential debate, "*I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponents youth and inexperience!*"

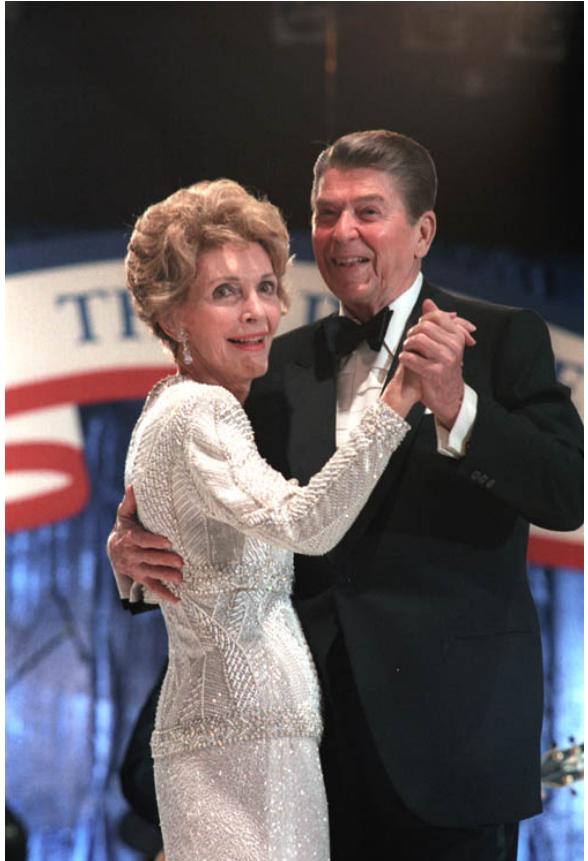
The quip was well timed and solicited applause from the audience and even Mondale. That November, Reagan made a clean sweep of 49 of 50 states – the only loss being Minnesota; Mondale's home state.

Reagan's second term was early dogged by controversies; his first involving a visit to the German military cemetery in Bitburg where he laid a wreath for the fallen soldiers with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Earlier, it had been determined that Nazi soldiers were also buried there. On the home front, Reagan's laconic stance towards the growing HIV-AIDS epidemic garnered outrage from the gay and lesbian communities.

During the summer of 1985 Reagan underwent surgery to remove cancerous polyps from his colon and skin cancer cells in his nose. Reoccurring cells in his nose were removed successfully that October. In each case, Reagan was presented as the picture of health and vitality. In fact, he returned to work the same day as his surgeries with a 'business as usual' attitude that only endeared him further with the conservative base who by now perceived him as the salvation of their nation.

On October 27, 1986 Reagan made his aggressive stance on the war against drugs more concrete with the signing of an enforcement bill, openly criticized for promoting racial disparity in prison populations because of its differences in sentencing for crack and powder cocaine offenders. Critics also charged that the bill in no way reduced the availability of drugs on the street.

(Top: sharing an inaugural dance after a landslide victory. Middle: the Reagans enjoy a movie inside the White House theater – a luxury that seemed to acquire more poignancy given Reagan's own tenure in the movies. Bottom: shaking hands with then pro bodybuilder and rising film star, Arnold Schwarzenegger in 1984. Perhaps this is the first time Arnold began to consider his own aspirations in the political arena.)





(Above: 'so happy together' – the détente that Reagan struck with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was by far the most astounding coup in Reagan's presidency. Clearly, Reagan's charisma was working overtime and yet there seemed to be something more that transpired between these two heads of state; a genuine and mutual affection for one another and a belief that peaceful American/Soviet relations were not only possible, but essential to each country's political future.

Right: Signing the INF Treaty in 1987. Reagan cannot contain his glee. Bottom: reaching for the hand of a young boy during his Red Square visit May 31, 1988. Reagan was hailed as a celebrity by the Russian people – a level of popularity that ruffled a few Communist feathers and had the KGB keeping a watchful eye on the crowds as Reagan made his way through the streets).

Once again, it was Reagan's response to a national tragedy that brought the country together. On January 28 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger disintegrated in mid-air a mere 73 seconds after liftoff as a televised audience looked on in horror. Postponing his State of the Union Address, Reagan instead delivered one of the most moving speeches of his Presidency:

*"... 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."*





...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...they, the members of the Challenger crew, were pioneers.

...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.

...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 an 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 their journey and waved goodbye and slipped the surly bonds of earth to 'touch the face of God.'

Three days later Reagan delivered an even more eloquent address during the Johnson Space Center memorial service that, in part read:

"We come together today to mourn the loss of seven brave Americans, to share the grief that 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 the loved ones of our shuttle astronauts. To those they left behind -- the mothers, the fathers, the husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, yes, and 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 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 their lives -- with dedication, honor, and an unquenchable desire to explore this mysterious and beautiful universe.

...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.

...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."*

# LAST ACT FINALES

It is fair to say that Reagan's final years in office represented new challenges to his presidency that were met with varying and indifferent levels of success. Throughout Reagan's presidency, political relationships between Libya and the United States were contentious at best.

In April 1986, the detonation of a bomb in a crowded Berlin discotheque (which resulted in 63 American military personnel being injured and one death of a serviceman) prompted Reagan to authorize a series of air strikes designed to halt Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's ability to export terrorism around the world. Defending the strikes, Reagan concluded in a televised address that *"When our citizens are attacked or abused anywhere in the world on the direct orders of hostile regimes, we will respond so long as I'm in this office."*

The year was also marked by Reagan's signing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act that made it illegal to knowingly hire or recruit illegal immigrants but also granted amnesty to approximately 3 million illegals who had entered the U.S. prior to January 1, 1982. But perhaps 1986 will remain best remembered as the year Reagan's presidency was rocked by the Iran-Contra scandal. In essence, the administration was accused of funneling monies from covert arms sales to Iran to fund the Contras in Nicaragua. The International Court of Justice ruled that the U.S. had violated international law and Reagan was forced to profess general ignorance about its existence. During the resulting televised inquest, Reagan's popularity plummeted from 67 to 46 percent in less than a week.

(Previous page, top: delivering his televised address following the Challenger disaster. Bottom: Commemorating the restoration of the Statue of Liberty on Governor's Island in July 1986. This page, top: Waving goodbye to an unknown person on his last day in office, Jan. 20, 1989. Middle: Meeting with the Tower Commission on the Iran Contra Scandal on Feb. 11, 1987. Bottom: enjoying waving to the crowds. Reagan never lost his zeal for the American people, even when the polls illustrated that they might have lost their respect for him.)



To some extent, Ronald Reagan's next challenge to newly appointed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was prompted by the very real fact that by 1980 the U.S.S.R had built a military arsenal and army surpassing that of the United States. Since the Revolution, the Soviets had been fronted by some very hard line communist dictators and by a stalwart lack of diplomacy with the U.S. Both countries thought of the other as their elemental threat. Reagan, however, sensed a change in the wind with Gorbachev's appointment and set out to forge a new alliance with 'the enemy' state.

At the same time, Reagan's diplomacy had persuaded Saudi Arabia to increase its oil production; a move that caused gas prices to fall in the U.S. but crippled Soviet export revenues. A seemingly more liberal and open leader than his predecessors, Gorbachev agreed to meet Reagan for four summit conferences around the world: in Geneva, Iceland Washington and Moscow. Just prior to the third summit, Gorbachev announced his intention to pursue significant arms agreements with the U.S.

During this interim, Reagan also put forth a challenge to Gorbachev at the Berlin Wall, declaring that if the U.S.S.R. truly desired peaceful relations between the two nations, the exercised proof would be in Gorbachev tearing down this blockade that, for so long, had represented communist oppression.

Together, Reagan and Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at the White House in 1987. Passed into law the following year as Reagan was attending the final summit in Moscow, the treaty eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons. Treated as a celebrity by the Russians while in Moscow, Reagan conceded that he no longer considered the Soviet's the 'evil empire'. In 1989, the world looked on with general amazement as the Berlin Wall – a cold war symbol of Soviet noncompliance for so many decades was torn down by eager revelers on both sides. Two years later, Communism was no more.

To say that the end of the Reagan Presidency in 1989 was the end of an era is putting things mildly. Despite political crises, health concerns and often formidable opposition to his plans for economic reform from the Democratic Party, Ronald Reagan had accomplished a staggering amount of the precepts he had set out to establish at the start of his first inaugural.

**(Top: the famous 'tear down this wall' speech that led to the downfall of Communism. Middle: signed, sealed and delivered; a truce between the U.S. and the Soviets. Bottom: the Reagans prepare for their final departure from the State Capital.)**





In his 34<sup>th</sup> and final address to the nation, Reagan continued to display the optimism and passion for the country he had presided over for 8 years.

*"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 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 goodbyes, of course, and leaving this beautiful place...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 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.*

*...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 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 moment. It reminded me that while the man on 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.*





(Previous page: 'with tears and a journey' – Reagan salutes his loyalists in the White House and waves from the helicopter. Middle: flying over Washington. Middle: aboard Air Force One a year earlier and clearly looking forward to his retirement. Holding up a jersey with 'The Gipper' logo affixed to its back in Endicott, NY 1984. This page: proudly inspecting the troops of the USS New Jersey. It's a fair assessment to say that by the end of his term in office, Ronald Reagan was one of the most beloved national figures in United States history. The memory of his presidency has retained that luster.)

*We must keep up our guard, but we must also continue to work together to lessen and eliminate tension and mistrust... 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.*

*...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 8 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 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.*

*...But now, we're about to enter the nineties and some things have changed. Younger parents aren't sure that an un-ambivalent 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 re-institutionalized 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 protection.*

*So, we've got to teach history based not on what's in fashion but what's important... 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 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 8 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 8 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. And so, goodbye, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.*

Immediately following his departure from Washington, the Reagans traveled between their Bel Air home and ranch in Santa Barbara. Once, in a long while, they would appear on behalf of the Republican Party.

**(Top: explaining 'Reaganomics' on television in 1981. Middle: fielding a Q&A session in 1988. Bottom: rising to the occasion and showing his strength immediately after arriving home from the hospital in 1981.)**



In November 1991, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library was opened to the public with a dedication ceremony that included five presidents. Reagan's final public address came on February 3, 1994 during a tribute in Washington; his last major appearance in April for the funeral of President Richard Nixon. But it was a hand written confession penned in August of that same year that proved the most stunning revelation of them all:

*"I have recently been told that I am one of the millions of Americans who will be afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease," he wrote, "...at the moment I feel just fine. I intend to live the remainder of the years God give me on this earth doing the things I have always done...I know begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead. Thank you, my friends. May God always bless you."*

As the years went on, the disease slowly eroded Reagan's mental capacity. Questioned by CNN's Larry King, Nancy Reagan confessed to the nation that her husband's condition had worsened to the extent that he would like to be remembered as he had been and not as he currently was. As such, Reagan remained out of the public spotlight, sequestered to his beloved ranch where a fall and subsequent hip surgery did much to slow down this once vital man.



Ronald Wilson Reagan died in Bel Air, California on June 5, 2004 – ten years after his Alzheimer diagnosis. He was 93 years old. June 11 was declared a National Day of Mourning by President George W. Bush. Reagan's body was taken to the Kingsley and Gates Funeral Home in Santa Monica and then, on June 7 to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. On June 9, Reagan's body was flown to Washington where he became the tenth United States president to lie in state; the first since Lyndon Johnson in 1973. During those thirty-four hours 104,684 people filed past the coffin.

On June 11, a state funeral at Washington's National Cathedral prompted heartfelt eulogies from both Presidents Bush, former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and, perhaps most poignant of all, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (through pre-recorded address).

Today, Ronald Reagan's presidential legacy remains open to debate. While some continue to laud him for his economic reform and bringing about an end to the Cold War, others have argued that his policies created a major deficit and sacrificed the U.S.'s reputation on the world stage.

To what extent Reagan's fortitude brought about an end to communism has also been debated by pundits even though Gorbachev himself has said that "*Reagan was instrumental in bringing about the end of the Cold War;*" a plaudit concurred by Britain's Margaret Thatcher who added that "*Ronald Reagan had a higher claim than any other leader to have won the Cold War for liberty and he did it without a shot being fired.*"

Reagan's political views also helped to reshape the Republican Party as a modern conservative movement. More men voted Republican under Reagan; the so-called 'Reagan Democrats'. In the final analysis, Reagan had become the iconic symbol of influence within the Republican Party.

Of his ability to connect with the masses – dubbed 'The Great Communicator' – Reagan himself had always been both modest and reflective; "*I never thought it was my style that made a difference — it was the content. I wasn't a great communicator, but I communicated great things.*" Indeed, he had. As it turned out, Ronald Reagan proved a very tough act to follow. In June 2005, The Discovery Channel ran a popularity poll that asked its viewers to vote for The Greatest American of all time: Ronald Wilson Reagan received that honorary title.

