

## **Reagan and the Media**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of the role of the President and the expanding sphere of presidential activities are conditions that are referred to or taken for granted in United States History courses. The actions of individuals are stressed, but factors that contribute to the popularity of a particular President or to the power of the Presidency in general are skimmed over or omitted. In the twentieth century, American Presidents have increasingly gone directly to the citizens for support for particular programs and, in making this sort of appeal, have become better known to the average voter than is the voter's own Congressional Representative (Kernell, *passim*). Ronald Reagan, athlete, film star, union leader and politician, was particularly adept at this approach.

The unit will be written for an 11<sup>th</sup> grade course in United States History. The student audience is a regular history class, but it could be adapted for Advanced Placement courses. This curriculum will help students increase their ability to analyze visual communications, to interpret political cartoons, to listen more carefully to speeches and to read their textbook critically. Reading the speeches will increase their vocabulary. I will teach this topic by using as many visual aids as possible and by using the written texts of selected speeches; some of these speeches are also available on the Internet and the students will be able to hear them. There will be one or two lesson plans to accompany each section.

This unit will help students investigate the relationship between the President and the media. By media I include both the technological advances in communication and the people who report the news. The visibility and power of an incumbent Chief Executive have been increased by his ability to use and manipulate improved technology and by the media's ability, whether deliberately or not, to shape and develop the image of the President. Students will learn how Presidents were viewed by the media or how they were referred to in the press. The focus will be on a significant twentieth century President, Ronald Reagan, whose administration knew how to manage the media and whose personality was attractive and interesting to readers and viewers. The unit will be taught in conjunction with a section in the textbook, "The Republican Revolution," that includes a chapter titled "Reagan Comes to Power." Reagan is described as a "conservative Republican... [who]... appealed to voters who were unhappy with liberal politics" (Boyer 771). This is the first time in the text where the word "liberal" is used. The student can infer from the paragraph that "liberals" are for the Equal Rights Amendment, gun control, school busing and abortion and are against free enterprise, school prayer and a strong national defense. The unit will also provide a more balanced view and interpretation of this term.

### **RONALD REAGAN**

#### **From Democrat to Republican**

Reagan's biography is the subject of many books, some of which are hagiographic and anticipate the outpouring of emotion and hyperbolic memorials given at the time of his death. All try to find explanations of both significant events in his life, such as his change from a New Deal Democrat to a conservative pro-business Republican and of the emphases of his presidency, in his

courting of evangelical religious groups and his attacks on big government. The task of getting the facts is made more difficult by a layer of almost mythological additions, some of which were added by the subject himself.

Important factors in his early childhood were his mother's strong religious beliefs and his father's loyalty to the Democratic Party. Although his family was hurt by the Depression, his father, luckier than most, was able to get a patronage job in a government program (Tygiel 21). Reagan was also able to get summer jobs as a lifeguard, positions that helped him pay for tuition and graduate from college in 1932 at a time when most people did not or could not afford this opportunity (Tygiel 19). This positive experience with Franklin D. Roosevelt's programs helps to explain his allegiance to the Democratic Party. Reagan cast his first presidential vote for Roosevelt, voted for him another three times and, decades later, was head of the Democrats for Nixon.

As a student in both high school and at college, there is evidence that he had an almost photographic memory (Edel 126). This ability helped him in the career he selected after graduating from Eureka College, radio sports announcing for baseball and football games. Most of the baseball games he broadcast were recreations. Wire reports of each pitch were relayed to radio stations where the sportscaster would call the game as though he were in the park. To be effective and convincing at this, the broadcaster needed a good imagination and the ability to speak without a real script. Reagan was very successful at this, moved from local stations to regional ones and eventually had a position on WHO in Des Moines (Tygiel 27). In 1937 he moved to Hollywood where he worked under contract to Warner Brothers where he was cast as lead in B-movies (Tygiel 33). Although he became famous and relatively wealthy in films, he was mired in B-films and, with one exception, did not win a leading role in the major A-films. His one major "A-film" appearance was in the supporting role of George Gipp in *Knute Rockne - All American*. This was the film that provided the memorable line in Gipp's deathbed scene, "Win one for the Gipper."

During his Hollywood years, he became active in the Screen Actors' Guild and served as president of the Hollywood local. In World War II he was assigned to a film production unit that made training films for the army. After the war, he continued his Guild activities. This was the era of investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) into alleged Communist activity and attempts to insert Communist propaganda, messages and values into Hollywood films. Although Reagan did not give the committee names, there is evidence that he was an F.B.I. informer at this time (Edel 308).

Eventually, he was too old to be convincing in the type of roles in which he had been cast and his movie career ended. He moved to television in 1954 and served as the host for the General Electric Theatre, a very popular hour-long drama series. This position led to his becoming a spokesman for the General Electric Company. In this capacity, Reagan had to travel to all the General Electric factories and speak to audiences both at the plants and in the towns and cities in which the facilities were located (Tygiel 73). In his appearances, he delivered a talk that stressed the importance of business. It is during this period that his move toward the Republican Party began. Other television appearances included acting in several episodes of *Wagon Train* and serving as host for the weekly series *Death Valley Days* (Tygiel 80). These last two programs gave him the opportunity to be associated with action programs, a genre in which he had been unsuccessful in Hollywood (Tygiel 67).

His final film, *Hellcats of the Navy* (1957), is notable because it is the only film in which Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan (then Nancy Davis) appeared together. This was the John Wayne-type role that Reagan craved. The film is interesting because one can see some of the

gestures that were used later in public life by Reagan. Nancy Reagan's supporting and supportive role also foreshadows her real life role as devoted wife and supportive First lady.

Reagan's emergence on the national scene came in 1960 when he campaigned for Richard Nixon as a "Democrat for Nixon" (Tygiel 78). By 1964 he had declared himself to be a Republican and spoke forcefully in behalf of Barry Goldwater in his *A Time for Choosing* speech (10/27/64). This nationally broadcast speech contained hallmarks of Reagan's later speeches: human interest anecdotes, references to the Founding Fathers, examples of government corruption and government waste, misuse of welfare, references to religion and denigration of "liberals." Two years later he was elected Governor of California, an office he held for two terms. His conservative leanings were obvious in his confrontational approach toward the student unrest at Berkeley (Tygiel 101-104).

Had Nixon completed his two terms as president, Reagan would have run for President in 1976. Watergate changed the political picture and presented Gerald Ford as an incumbent candidate. Reagan decided to challenge Ford and won several Republican state primaries after changing the focus of his campaign from taxes, social security and welfare to foreign affairs (Tygiel 108). Although he did not get the nomination, his stature as a national candidate was increased by his exposure.

Reagan's persona incorporated a college athlete, a truth-telling good guy of most of his early film roles, a folksy host of a television series, an active governor and, finally, a President who appeared in carefully staged press conferences and used cinematic gestures.

### **The Media**

One of the major concerns of any President of the United States is his relationship with the Press. The Press and any public figure have a real need for one another – the reporter has to get his story and the public figure needs the reporter to help put a favorable spin on his activities. The President should be accessible to the Press. How this accessibility is accomplished is difficult to regulate. There are also competing needs in the Press. In the matter of deadlines, a newspaper reporter might have a later one than that of a television journalist who needs something for the early evening network news. An early afternoon Press Conference helps the television reporter, but an evening event favors the print media.

The personal relationship between the President and the press also has potential problems. If a President gives exclusive interviews to individual reporters, there is the appearance of favoritism. Presidents have frequently had these one-on-one interviews with correspondents on television news programs. This one-on-one situation is less confrontational and the accompanying familiarity tends to cause the reporter to be less persistent in pursuing inconsistencies in a President's statements or positions on programs. Franklin D. Roosevelt had an excellent relationship with the Press, gave frequent opportunities for questions and provided the reporters with good stories. Presidents who have had good rapport with the Press put the reporters in another difficult position. Apparent warm feelings and mutual respect cause reporters to skim over items that might be important for the public to know. A major example was the health of Franklin D. Roosevelt at the time of his last campaign. In pre-television days, the public had to rely on staged pictures and words. FDR's deteriorating health was not discussed. In a similar vein, the Press ignored John F. Kennedy's health problems along with questionable relationships with females. These situations had the potential to pose threats to the national security.

After Vietnam and Watergate, the relationships between Presidents and the news media became more adversarial and confrontational. In the Reagan administration, the number of formal Press conferences declined (Muir 172) and reporters used photo opportunities to shout

questions to the President. Reagan did appear before press conferences of reporters who were not assigned to Washington, people who were, in general, more malleable and more apt to be awed and swayed by the panoply of the Presidency. Even the Washington reporters were less vigilant on many occasions and let misstatements stand. Examples of this lack of follow-up occurred with Reagan's comments about the success of cost cutting in the Defense Department (Edel 165) and the ability to recall nuclear warheads after they had been launched (Edel 266).

A President can appear before the media in various environments. He can give a formal press conference, take questions at photo opportunities, issue statements and not allow questions, give a talk to a special interest group, deliver repeated "stump speeches" while campaigning or present formal speeches to a national or international audience (Muir 172). According to Wilbur Edel, a harsh critic, Reagan had about 40 people who carefully scripted his media appearances, spending over two days preparing and rehearsing for press conferences (263). One innovation in the Reagan Press Conferences was to have the President enter the East Room of the White House, where the conference was held, from a red-carpeted entrance hall behind his lectern. This made an effective and vivid television entrance with the protagonist/hero making an almost triumphal procession from the private quarters to the public political arena. Reagan's experience as an actor enabled him to feel most comfortable in a heavily scripted appearances such as formal speeches where he could use cue cards, recite prepared answers and put his best side toward the cameras (Edel 278).

Reagan's public image was polished by careful stage-managing and by restricting the ability of reporters to ask questions. Photo opportunities were scheduled, but the press was not allowed to ask questions. Questions shouted at the President as he walked to a waiting helicopter were ignored on the pretext that he could not hear. The press also gave Reagan an extended "honeymoon." One reason for this is the assassination attempt three months after he took office (Thomas 35). The bravery and humor he exhibited in this ordeal made good copy, increased his popularity and contributed to the illusion of physical good health and vitality. Another reason was the concerted effort of the press to try and be objective and give fair treatment to a conservative President. Benjamin Bradlee, editor of the *Washington Post*, said that his paper did not use the same standards with Reagan as they had with Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter (Hertsgaard 3).

The Reagan administration also realized that it was good public relations to increase the formal rituals and symbols associated with the Office of the President (Denton 11). In contrast to the Carter presidency, ceremonial rituals were restored and increased. *Hail to the Chief* was played regularly and troops were reviewed. The Presidential yacht *Sequoia* was put back in service. A new china service was ordered for the White House. Reagan did not want to be seen doing things that were less than presidential, such as carrying his own suitcase, as Gerald Ford did, or appear in the Oval Office in casual clothing. He did not want to make the mistake that Jimmy Carter did when Carter, wearing a cardigan sweater, addressed the nation about the country's malaise. Noonan suggests that Reagan's mental image of the Oval Office was that shown in the film *Yankee Doodle Dandy* when James M. Cohan, played by James Cagney, met Franklin Roosevelt (Noonan 157).

To get his message across, Reagan preferred to address the American people directly and to avoid having to go through the "filter of the press" (Wallison 122). Because radio time is cheaper than prime-time television, Reagan used the Saturday afternoon radio talk to reach the people. This method was also an effective tool of Franklin Roosevelt. Another way to get the message across was to carefully script what story should be released. Public Relations were very important in the Reagan White House and one of Reagan's closest advisors, Michael Deaver, had a long and successful background in this field. Each evening at the White House the top staff (Baker, Deaver, and Darman) would meet to decide what the next day's story would be. The strategy was

to provide the story and in this way the news could be controlled (Wallison 128). Because television needs strong visual images, if the reporter giving the story could be filmed against a picturesque background, the piece would get airtime. An example of this type of management is the 1984 release of news about increased housing starts. Instead of merely issuing the data and some showing some graphs, Reagan flew to Fort Worth to be filmed in a new subdivision (Hertsgaard 251). The site provided a good background and the geographical location, far beyond the Washington Beltway, emphasized the benefit of Reagan's programs for the entire country.

The administration also tried to limit reporters' access to news. Sometimes this was done to minimize the impact of bad news. The 1984 announcement of the withdrawal of the marines from Lebanon following the bombing of the barracks was made at 6:15 P.M. in an attempt to avoid exposure on the 6:30 news programs. This was not completely successful, because ABC did manage to get it on the evening program (Hertsgaard 379). During the invasion of Grenada in October 1983, no reporters were allowed to accompany the troops during the invasion, and later, after the island was secured, were allowed to travel only under strict military control. This strategy has been used with some changes by the Bush administrations in the Gulf War and in the invasion of Iraq.

News can also be managed by providing reporters with "leaks," information about private meetings that is given to selected reporters. The source of the leak is not given. Leaking was a big problem in the Reagan administration. Wallison argues that leaks caused the people in the White House to be more secretive and to give out information only to those who really needed it. This approach reduced the number of people who could comment on a particular policy and, in turn, limited the amount of discussion and analysis (147).

### **Speechwriting**

Even if a President had a lot of help, he had to be able to deliver a speech movingly and effectively and Ronald Reagan could do this very well. His vocal tone, sense of timing, posture, enunciation and emphasis all contributed to excellent oratory. William K. Muir, a Reagan admirer, reports that Reagan had six speechwriters and about a dozen researchers (23). The chief speechwriter assigned a speech to one of the writers. A first draft was circulated for comments and additions to the chief speechwriter, the President and to all government departments and agencies whose interests were affected by the subject of the speech. If no corrections were needed, the speechwriter would then rework the speech and would send corrected versions to the President until a final text was achieved (Muir 33-35). Muir maintains that there was frequent conflict between the conservative speechwriters and other members of Reagan's senior advisory staff, but he felt that the speechwriters were generally able to keep control of a speech.

Peggy Noonan, one of Reagan's White House speechwriters, described her approach to her job. The first thing she did after getting to the White House was to read Reagan's earlier speeches and the major addresses of previous Presidents. This gave her a feeling for Reagan's personal style and a familiarity with the tradition of presidential addresses. She also read a lot of poetry and biography and observed that politicians would be better served if their speeches were written by history majors who had an understanding of the historical importance of an event and not by communications majors who were more concerned with the ten-second sound bite (71). For a particular speech, she needed information about the audience, the occasion, geographical location and background on the topic. Her time frame was about a week for a major address and four or five days for a shorter one (Noonan 72, 75). In creating a speech, the writer had to use Reagan's style and to employ phrases that were compatible with his personality and his delivery. Reagan gave a packet of his old speeches to the writers and told them to imitate his style (Erickson 8). Noonan's belief that "specificity is the soul of creativity" (Noonan 124) fits in

nicely with Reagan's preference for stories and references to individuals that appear in almost all of his speeches and contribute to his effectiveness as a speaker.

Paul Erickson argues that many of Reagan's speeches fall into the category of the jeremiad – an exhortation to the country to follow certain values that will lead to a better future (87, 89). He sees the conflict between good and evil as a major theme throughout Reagan's addresses. To illustrate these opposites, Reagan uses stock figures that are similar to characters in a morality play (51). The idealized mother, representing goodness, gives advice and instills values that can be learned without an education (54). Children represent the future. The sons, especially those who become soldiers, represent obedience to the United States and the defense of the values taught by the Mother (57). The image of the soldier can fill the roles of father, husband and child. The Citizens have common sense, believe in the country and do not exhibit any intellectual skepticism toward the policies or programs of the United States. Intellectual skepticism, in this morality system, is a "hubristic sin" (61). Intellectuals, academics, and liberal politicians are the villains who are out-of-touch with the real world.

## **Selected Speeches**

### ***The Challenger Disaster - January 28, 1986: Formal Mourning***

One of the roles of the president is to serve as a spokesman for the country at times of great national sorrow. The disintegration of the space shuttle Challenger needed a formal statement from the White House. Television coverage of space shuttle launchings in the previous few years had been eliminated because the launches had become so routine that there was little news value. Interest was rekindled with the Challenger mission because of the inclusion of a teacher, Christa McAuliffe, in the crew. Many school children were watching the launch and saw the disaster on their television screens. President Reagan postponed his State of the Union address and gave this formal eulogy to the crew.

This short speech, written by Peggy Noonan, (255) begins with references to the shared pain of the country in the loss of the astronauts. "Pain" and "loss" are key words at the beginning of this speech. Throughout the speech euphemisms are used to refer to the explosion that destroyed the shuttle and the crew. The President specifically mentions himself and his wife as mourners. The crew members are named and, in the audio version, Reagan gives each name emphasis. The mood then changes to one of appreciation for the pioneering and dangerous work involved in space flight. Acknowledging that there was danger in this program was a departure from the NASA emphasis on the redundancy systems in the program that reduced risk. The children are told that to explore, chances must be taken. So the children are encouraged to be daring and take risks for worthwhile ends.

The space program is praised for giving out all the information and not trying to cover-up failure. A firm promise is given to continue the program. In this section, the key word is "more." He mentions that the death of Sir Francis Drake occurred on the same day and concludes with a quotation *High Flight* from by John G. Magee, Jr. The excerpt "slipped the surly bonds of earth ... and touched the face of God" combines the first and last lines of the sonnet and changes the meaning of the poem from the feeling of exultation the pilot gets from flying and living to its opposite, flying high to meet death. Magee had been a volunteer in the Royal Canadian Air Force and had been killed in England in December 1941 (U.S. Air Force Museum). This reference combines patriotism, heroism and religion.

### ***40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day (Pointe du Hoc) - June 6, 1984: Memorial***

On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, President Reagan delivered two speeches at the site of the Allied landings, Omaha Beach and at Point du Hoc, the cliffs at one end of the beach that were taken by U.S. Ranger divisions. This speech is vintage Reagan with stories, humor, anecdotes,

and references to loyalty, patriotism, and religion. There are also allusions to Lincoln's Gettysburg address and the Civil War. The speech was written by Peggy Noonan (Muir 27).

There are several parallels to the Gettysburg Address. First, each speech was given at the location of a horrific series of engagements in which each side suffered heavy casualties. Lincoln had gone to Gettysburg to dedicate a military cemetery and Reagan had visited Pointe du Hoc to dedicate a memorial to American Rangers and later to visit the military cemetery. Second, each speech emphasizes the sense of place, as in "we're here to mark that day" (Reagan) and "we are met here on..." (Lincoln). Third, there is the use of the numbers "forty years ago"/ "four score and seven". Fourth, there are references to the dead who died for noble causes, the liberation of Europe and the preservation of the Union. Fifth, there are references to liberty, freedom, dedication and valor. Reagan also echoes Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address when he mentions the post World War II reconciliation between Germany and her former enemies and the rebuilding that was necessary. Reagan extends his references to losses to include not only those who landed on D-Day, but also civilian casualties elsewhere in Europe, "It's fitting to remember..." the Russian civilians who were killed as it was "fitting and proper" for Lincoln to dedicate a cemetery for those who served the Union.

The Reagan speech had a beautiful setting – the cliffs above the beach. The message contains a patriotic theme with the soldiers as almost mythic heroes who overcame enormous dangers to complete their labor of climbing to the top of the cliff. Reagan sets the scene, praises the courage of the soldiers and then dramatically points to the veterans who had returned in a passage with effective anaphora and parallel construction, "These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc. These are ... These are ..." He uses specificity in the reference to Lord Lovat and moves on to the theme of faith in a just God and the importance of prayer in securing the beachhead. Patriotism and international cooperation are stressed.

He uses several rhetorical devices. There is a lot of alliteration: "loyalty and love," "liberation ...liberate ...liberty," "dying ...dying ...democracy ...dying," "porches and praying," and "prepared for peace." He uses frequently uses anaphora together with parallel construction. Another example is "prepared for peace; prepared to deter ...prepared to negotiate, ...prepared to teach." In his concluding he uses the Lincoln-esque phrase "good and fitting" to renew the commitment to freedom and the allies. He uses three phrases with the word "bound," and contrasts "then" and "now" and "our hopes" and "your hopes." The penultimate paragraph uses three hortatory expressions: "Let us make a vow to our dead. Let us show ...Let our actions say..." He concludes with three perfect participles "strengthened ...heartened...borne," modified by prepositional phrases all depending on a fourth hortatory, "let us continue."

Earlier in the day, Reagan had given a shorter speech on Omaha Beach which had been the sector assigned to American forces on D-Day and where the German resistance was the strongest. This shorter speech also exhibits typical rhetorical devices: alliteration "the worst of war"; anaphora "I'll go back ...I'll see". A major theme of the speech is the heroism of a specific person, Private Peter Zannata, whose daughter was present at the ceremony. Reagan's attention to and concern for individuals was demonstrated by his reading of a letter addressed to him by the daughter. The love of democracy and freedom and desire for unity and peace are other motifs.

### ***The Evil Empire - March 8, 1983: Jeremiad on Domestic Policy***

This speech was given in Orlando, Florida at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, a group that was very receptive to the positions taken on abortion and prayer in schools. It is a typical Reagan speech and has historical references, jokes, stories, religious messages and statements of moral values. It is noteworthy because this speech introduced the phrase the "Evil Empire" to refer to the Soviet Union.

Reagan starts by stating that prayer is important to him. In this respect, he compares himself to Abraham Lincoln. He then warms up and wins over the audience by telling some jokes. Moving on to more serious matters, he mentions that religion or God was valued by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Including Jefferson is questionable; however, erroneous details were not a concern to Reagan. Here he begins to contrast the positive and good values held by his administration with the value systems held by followers of “modern day secularism.” The listener is induced to conclude that if the Reagan administration is good, the opposites must be evil. These are people who support abortions and sexual promiscuity. Furthermore, their programs require increased government involvement in the lives of citizens. Reagan does not explain how his plan to require notification of parents will reduce the presence of government.

Prayer in schools is favored by this group and Reagan cites prayers in Congress as a precedent. He assumes that public prayer will lead to better moral values. This prayer section is a bridge between sections dealing with ending life, abortion and mercy killing. He gives an undocumented example of physicians allowing an infant to starve to death. This section of the speech concludes with a denunciation of hate groups. These hate groups are examples of sin that the United States has overcome.

The second half of the speech addresses other evil people, specifically the Soviet Union. These sinners have the same low moral values of the pro-abortionists. Therefore, the United States cannot agree to a nuclear freeze. Reagan presents himself as a peace lover who is in favor of a 50 per cent reduction in strategic missiles and a complete removal of land-based intermediate missiles. This is a suggestion the Soviets could not agree to because most of their missiles were of this last type. He urges that everyone pray for the people of the Soviet Union and not forget the history of this “evil empire.” He chastises the people who oppose his administration’s plan for nuclear weapon control as having excessive pride and removing themselves from the “struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.” The military and social dangers can be overcome by “moral will and faith.” He concludes with references to Whittaker Chambers, whose religious conversion experience caused him to renounce Communism and testify against Alger Hiss, and Thomas Paine, whose statement is altered to refer to churches.

### ***Brandenberg Gate (“Tear Down This Wall”) - June 12, 1987: Foreign Policy Jeremiad***

This speech makes an interesting contrast with Evil Empire address. Although it was delivered four years later, on a different continent and with an audience that included some hecklers, the same themes of freedom, national strength, and religious values are repeated.

The audience is won over not with jokes, but with two different colloquial German expressions that stress the unique status of Berlin, an approach that is reminiscent of John Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner.” Winston Churchill’s Iron Curtain speech, “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic...” is echoed in the “From the Baltic, south ...” The lofty tone is continued in a sweeping summary of the accomplishments of the “economic miracle” that occurred after World War II and the assistance of the Marshall Plan. There is the reminder that this prosperity was possible only because of the economic freedom that German businessmen enjoyed through free trade and lowered taxes.

The central part of the speech uses two sets of contrasts: the immediate Post War period and today in West Berlin and West Germany and the contemporary contrast between the standard of living in East and West Germany. He observes that the Russians have been moving toward more openness and then calls upon Gorbachev to tear down the wall. The repetition of “this” and the inclusion of the personal name is rhetorically very effective and builds to a dramatic climax, “Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

After this emotional highlight, Reagan returns to arms control and the Strategic Defense Initiative. Weapons bring security and ensure liberty. Liberty, in turn, allows free markets to operate and bring about economic growth throughout the globe. He urges, in four hortatory “let us” phrases that Berlin be the focal point of increased East- West ties. He concludes by praising the fortitude and courage of the Berliners and by condemning totalitarian states for preventing their citizens from worship. This lack of faith will cause the wall to fall. His final comments are addressed to demonstrators who are reminded that they can protest because they are in a free society.

### **Reagan Cartoons**

One of the anomalies of Ronald Reagan’s administration was that although Reagan was personally popular, many of his programs were not. His plan to protect the United States by installing a system that could shoot incoming missiles was opposed by scientists on the grounds that it would not work and by people who were concerned about the huge expense the Strategic Defense Initiative would involve. Although Reagan promised to share the technology with the Russians, the idea that one power might be able to withstand a first strike was destabilizing to the nuclear balance of power and threatened the theory of mutually assured destruction.

The two cartoons included in the lesson plans ridicule the fantastic aspect of the plan. Steve Greenberg’s drawing (8/24/86) makes fun of the false security promised by the plan. It shows Reagan tucked in bed, sucking his thumb, and holding onto a teddy bear. A book of fairy tales lies on the floor. A satellite shaped nightlight illuminates the happy faces on his blanket. Herb Block’s cartoon (1/25/87) shows Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, perched on an edge of a windowsill, ready to fly away to the stars, just as Mary Poppins and Peter Pan did. He is holding copies of these stories. Around his neck is a \$640 toilet seat. The fantasy of Peter Pan is combined with the reminder of the examples of extravagant and wasteful spending that were discovered in Pentagon contracts.

Another source of controversy was the economic plan that featured large tax cuts for the rich who, it was hoped, would use their additional income to invest in new businesses, increase production, and help lower income people in a “trickle down” effect. Because more people were earning larger incomes, the government would eventually get more money in income taxes than it had lost by giving the tax cuts. This policy was derisively known as “Reaganomics” and had been referred to by George H.W. Bush as “voodoo economics” in the 1980 Republican primaries.

Many others strongly opposed the deregulation of airlines and other businesses. In airline deregulation, companies could drop unprofitable routes, a move that resulted in the loss of plane service to smaller airports and an increase in scheduled flights to major cities at popular hours. The change in banking laws and easing of banking safeguards eventually led to the failure of many banks. The Federal Government was left with the responsibility of covering the extensive losses.

Pressure to cut taxes and to ease government regulation of business continued throughout Reagan’s administration. The lesson plans include four cartoons. The first Herb Block cartoon (4/12/81) shows Zeus, representing the budget, throwing a thunderbolt. The bolt has avoided a large Roman who is holding a jug of wine and strikes the head of a small figure who represents social programs. Greenberg’s cartoon (1/27/83) shows Reagan standing between two fiery mountains named “Military Spending” and “Tax Cut Plans.” White sheep (domestic spending) are running into the fires of each. Block (4/21/85) includes a reference to the 1978 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* with his “Invasion of the Corporate Body Snatchers.” Five winged monsters representing stock manipulation, takeover tactics and other predatory practices fly menacingly through a business area. Greenberg’s cartoon (3/4/86), “Reagan’s Gym,” focuses on the Gramm-Rudman bill. There are doors that lead to the Gramm-Rudman Reducing Salon and

to Reagan's Gym, the Home of Arms Build-ups. The figure exiting is an Uncle Sam who is a skeleton except for his head and huge muscled arms. Greenberg says he based the arms on those of Arnold Schwarzenegger.

A fourth major area involved the concerns about foreign policy. The United States presence in Lebanon resulted in disaster, and the quickly following invasion of Grenada aroused suspicions as to its real purpose. Was it a response to a genuine threat or just an effort to save face? The Iran-Contra scandal raised questions about Reagan's honesty, something that had not been seriously questioned before. In addition to the illegality of the Iran-Contra enterprise, the American public began to worry about how much the President knew. Reagan's seeming lack of involvement in day-to-day activities contributed to an accusation that he was not really in charge of his administration.

Foreign policy led to some of the most hostile cartoons. The lesson plans include five examples. Herb Block's "On to Central America" (3/13/84) shows a four-stack ocean liner (Lebanon Policy) similar to the *Titanic* sinking prow first. A rowboat commanded by an Admiral in a Spanish-American War uniform urges the rowers toward a new destination in Central America. The most damaging blow to Reagan's image and prestige came with his denial of the story about arms shipments to Iran for the return of American hostages from Lebanon. The memory of Iranian capture of the American Embassy was still recent and the idea of weapons being given anyone in Iran was unthinkable. Herb Block's Veterans' Day cartoon, "Arms payoff for Hostage Release" (11/11/86,) has Ayatollah Khomeini standing in shadow behind a television showing a picture of a resolute Ronald Reagan standing in front of an American flag. A month later, "Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick" (12/21/86) has pictures of four presidents, T. Roosevelt, F. D. Roosevelt, Truman, and Reagan. Each has a message under the picture. T. Roosevelt has the "Big stick" quotation, F. D. Roosevelt's message is "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," Truman's is "The Buck Stops Here." Reagan, still looking resolute has "Mistakes were made," but then the qualifier is added, "by somebody or other, not me." The third Block cartoon "Cardboard Ronald Reagan" (3/5/87) shows a small figure pushing up a cardboard cutout of the President. Steve Greenberg's "Nixon vs. Reagan" (7/21/87) has parallel panels of Reagan and Nixon. Nixon has his arms outstretched with his fingers indicating a V. Reagan has his shoulders hunched and his palms upright with a befuddled facial expression. The comparison and association is not a pleasant one.

The cartoonists' negative view of Reagan and his policies during his Presidential tenure was quite different from the depiction of Reagan at his death. The memorial cartoons are very laudatory. Part of this is due to a general tendency to say nothing bad about the dead, but the amount of adulation is still remarkable. This is an interesting change, because Reagan, unlike President Carter, did not lead an active public life after his Presidency. His Alzheimer's disease kept him out of view for the last decade of his life. Was there nostalgia for the simpler era he tried to embody and project, was it appreciation for the work he did to tear down the Berlin Wall, or is it the memory of the image that he wanted to project?

The memorial cartoons focus on several themes. Reagan's election slogan "Morning in America" is changed to "Mourning in America." He is depicted as a cowboy headed to the last round-up and as an actor taking his final curtain call. Patriotism and pride in the United States are shown by references to the "City on a Hill." There are also several that draw parallels between the pearly gates of heaven and the Berlin Wall. This comparison is valid in comparing Ronald Reagan's desire to get into heaven to the desires of the East Germans to be included in the more prosperous West Germany. But continuing the parallel to the addressees of the demands, Mikail Gorbachev and St. Peter, not only fails, but also borders on sacrilege.

The physical characteristics that were caricatured by cartoonists stayed the same throughout his life. His dark hair was combed high above his forehead. His face is elongated, emphasizing the distance between the nose and the mouth. The cheekbones are prominent. His mouth is frequently shown with a lop-sided smile.

### **The Farewell Announcement**

The good will toward Reagan that built up in the last ten years of his life probably began in November, 1994, when he announced that he had Alzheimer's disease and gave his graceful farewell to the American people and to public life. In this brief written statement, he reminded the public of the health problems that both he and his wife had experienced during his presidency and that publicity generated by their illnesses had increased people's concerns about cancer.

His message included appreciation for his country, his family and his friends, in addition to religious references. He concluded with an echo of the "Morning in America" campaign theme stating that there would always be a "bright dawn ahead."

By the early 1990s, awareness of Alzheimer's disease was growing because of the increased number of the elderly who had been affected by this disease, but there was no one famous person who could be associated with it, as FDR had been linked with polio, or Lou Gehrig had been identified with the degenerative neurological disease that was named after him. Ronald Reagan became a very prominent symbol of Alzheimer's. As the years went on, photo opportunities became rarer and finally stopped. At the time of his death in June, 2004, he had faded completely from the scene and there was no recent animosity that might put a brake on emotional outpouring.

Since his death, Ronald Reagan has become similar to Franklin D. Roosevelt in another way. The need for research into the causes of Alzheimer's disease has been publicized in the same way that the need for a cure for polio was presented in the Roosevelt administration. Nancy Reagan has become increasingly active in lobbying for the greater availability of stem cells to be used by those doing research into therapies for diseases like Alzheimer's. This activity brings a final irony and contradiction into the Reagan legacy, the use of a person so closely associated with family values and the right to life emerging in death as a symbol of demands that are claimed by the incumbent Republican President, who is the son of his former Vice-President, to oppose family values and the right to life.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Graphing Lesson**

The purpose of this lesson is to show students the various subjects of presidential speeches. This exercise will also help them learn to use charts and graphs.

Terms to explain: news conference, interview, journalist, briefing, eulogy.

Muir (172) gives the following numbers for Ronald Reagan's Press conferences. Put them into a bar graph.

For 1981-1989. Presidential news conferences, 46; Single issue briefings, 34, sustained interviews, 33; wide-ranging press conferences 38; interview with foreign journalists, 31, regional press conferences, 53.

Use a bar graph to illustrate the following figures for yearly dealings with the press:

(Muir 172). 1981, 22; 1982, 34; 1983, 51; 1984, 36; 1985, 34; 1986, 25; 1987, 16; 1988-89, 17.

Religious talks (Muir, 133). For this bar graph, use the number of speeches given.

1981, 13, 8.1%; 1982, 24, 9.8%; 1983, 24, 8.5%; 1984, 42, 12.6%; 1985, 20, 9.5%; 1986, 20,

7.5%; 1987, 21, 8.0%; 1988, 27, 9.1%. This includes speeches to religious audiences, speeches with religious themes and funeral eulogies.

To extend this lesson, students could be asked to use the percentages to figure out how many speeches the president gave in each year. The number of speeches could then be put into a bar graph.

### **Pointe du Hoc Speech**

Have students read Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the Pointe du Hoc Speech. Review with students the circumstances of each speech.

Provide students with copies of the speech. Read the speeches out loud. Go over unfamiliar vocabulary.

In the Gettysburg Address, have students underline the following words and phrases: four score, we are, testing, met, cannot, fitting and proper, dedicate, devotion, freedom, remember and here.

Find verbal parallels between the speeches.

1. Why does each speech use numbers ("forty" and "four score and seven")?
2. Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase. Find examples of anaphora in each speech. (Lincoln: "cannot dedicate, cannot consecrate, cannot hallow." Reagan: last three paragraphs: "bound," "let us..." Reference to "These are the boys...")
3. What is the purpose of each speech?
4. What parallels are there between the importance of the battles at Normandy and at Gettysburg? Who were the invaders at each place? What sacrifices were made by each side? How was the outcome of each war affected?
5. What references to God are made in each speech?
6. Where does Reagan use humor? Is there any humor in Lincoln's speech?
7. Both Lincoln and Reagan say that their remarks are "fitting." Why does each believe this?
8. What countries are mentioned in Reagan's speech?
9. What individuals are named? How does this differ from Lincoln's speech?
10. Find examples of alliteration in each speech.
11. Find examples of parallel construction in each speech.

Finally, listen to Reagan's speech on the Internet.

### **Evil Empire and Brandenburg Gate Speeches**

Provide copies of the speeches for the students. Review the division of Berlin and Germany after World War II.

Review unfamiliar vocabulary with the students:

1. How does the President win over the audience in each case? What stories or jokes does he tell?  
Why is it effective to use German?
2. The Berlin speech uses specific details to describe how east and west are separated. What are these details?
3. What contrasts are used to describe Germany in the past and now?
4. In Berlin Reagan said that German farmers and businessmen enjoy economic freedom because German leaders have increased prosperity by expanding free trade and lowering taxes. What sort of support did Reagan have in the United States from farmers and businessmen? How did Reagan lower taxes?
5. Find places in each speech where "freedom" and "liberty" are mentioned.

6. What is the role that religion and prayer should have?
7. Why is it important that Reagan mention the Strategic Defense Initiative in the Berlin speech?
8. In the Evil Empire speech, what country is the “Evil Empire”? Why?
9. In the Evil Empire speech, what is the role of government? Is Reagan’s position logical when he says that government is trying to get involved in people’s lives, and then adds that in some cases, government should require parents of teenagers to be notified?
10. Who is the audience for each speech?
11. In each speech, find examples of anaphora, parallel construction, and alliteration.
12. What is the Reichstag? In the 1930s a fire there helped bring Hitler to power. Why does Reagan not mention this event? Why do Reagan’s references to Germany begin with the late 1940s?
13. Listen to the Berlin Speech on the Internet.

### **Reagan Cartoons**

Students will have to use the Internet. The cartoons on the sites are not in the public domain. The cartoons may be consulted, but not copied.

Students can analyze 10 to 12 political cartoons in a 90-minute class period. Students should answer the following questions for each cartoon:

What is the subject of each cartoon?

1. Who is pictured? What are the characteristics of each figure?
2. What symbols are used?
3. What is the message of the cartoon?
4. What is the attitude of the cartoonist toward the subject?

### ***Political Cartoons:***

All of Herb Block’s cartoons appeared in the *Washington Post*.

1. Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars):
  - a. Herb Block, “Our Bags are Packed,” (1/25/87). Weinberger ready to jump off roof.
  - b. Steve Greenberg, “Night Light.” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. (8/24/86). Students can list comforting items.
2. Tax Cuts and Deregulation:
  - a. Herb Block, “The Gods Are Angry.” (4/12/81) Lightning hits social programs.
  - b. Steve Greenberg, “Sacrifices for the Deficit.” *Los Angeles Daily News*. (1/27/83). Sheep going to death for military spending and tax cuts.
  - c. Herb Block, “Invasion of the Corporate Body Snatchers” (4/21/85). Monsters flying through city.
  - d. Steve Greenberg, “Reagan’s Gym,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. (3/4/86). Skeleton emerging from gym.
3. Iran-Contra and Reagan’s Image:
  - a. Herb Block, “On to Central America” (3/13/84). Sinking ship of Lebanon policy.
  - b. Herb Block, “Arms Payment for Hostage Release” (11/11/86). Reagan on TV, Ayatollah in background.
  - c. Herb Block, “Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick” (12/21/86). Posters of TR, FDR, Truman, Reagan. Strong statements from 3, weak statement from Reagan.
  - d. Herb Block, “Cardboard Ronald Reagan” (3/5/87). Ronald Reagan as a cardboard cut-out.
  - e. Steve Greenberg, “Nixon vs. Reagan” (6/21/87). *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. Presents image of Reagan as being clueless.

### **Memorial cartoons:**

These are all on [http://cagle.slate.msn.com/news/Ronald Reagan/4.asp](http://cagle.slate.msn.com/news/Ronald%20Reagan/4.asp) to [7.asp](http://cagle.slate.msn.com/news/Ronald%20Reagan/7.asp)

1. The theme “Mourning in America” is used in the following cartoons:
  - a. Steve Benson (5.asp.) Head shoulder of a smiling Reagan.
  - b. Mike Thompson (4.asp). *Detroit Free Press*. Black shrouded portrait.
  - c. Bob Gorrell and Steve Kelley *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (5.asp). Each of these includes Uncle Sam and a Newspaper.
  - d. Gary Varvel (4.asp). *Indianapolis Star News*. Empty Cowboy boots.
2. Reagan as cowboy.
  - a. Jim Morin (6.asp). *The Miami Herald*. Riderless horse. U.S. flag as saddle blanket.
  - b. Chris Britt (6.asp). *The State Journal-Register*. (Springfield, IL) Reagan on horse, riding through puffy clouds to gates of heaven.
  - c. Olle Johansson (3asp.) *Norra Vasterblotten*. (Sweden) RR.
3. Reagan as movie star.
  - a. Pat Bagley (6asp.) *Salt Lake Tribune*. “That’s a Wrap.” Cowboy film.
  - b. Jack Ohman (7.asp). *The Portland Oregonian*. “Curtain Call.”
4. “Tear Down this Gate/Wall”.
  - a. Robert Ariail (3.asp). *The State* (SC).
  - b. Rick McKee (3.asp) *Augusta Chronicle* (GA). RR in business suit.
  - c. Gary McCoy (3asp.) *The Suburban Journals* (IL) RR with wings.
5. “City on the Hill” theme.
  - a. Clay Jones (7.asp). *The Freelance-Star*. (Fredericksburg, VA). Reagan enters heaven.
  - b. J.D. Crowe. *The Mobile Register*. R/Reagan with American flag on shirt.

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Thomas comments on the attempts to influence the Press and the difficulties that reporters had in getting news.

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This is a brief and fairly objective biography. There are interesting sections on Reagan's early life and film career. It could be used by students.

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