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POW WOW PAPER

THE BABYSITTER: A RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY

Unabridged Version

This paper should certainly fulfill one of the criteria for submission: It must be controversial. As a matter of fact, it is possible that once the subject is made clear, the paper could be unnecessary and the argument could begin.

Some of you are familiar with a few of my stories that explain and explore my youth. One in particular about Louis Armstrong was read by several of you. I thought it appropriate to begin this paper with the last page and one-half from my story *Hollywoodland* where I lived in 1938:

"We lived with my grandparents at first at 2841 Hollyridge Drive, and the house is still there. It was just a few blocks from the huge sign *Hollywood*, that grand icon of the 20th century. But then the sign read *Hollywoodland* and called attention to the area as a development. The "land" was removed after the war. My brother Jack and I would play in and around these letters, which are over 30 feet high.

"I went to school, fourth grade, at Cheremoya Grade School which was on Cheremoya Avenue. The avenue, as well as the school, still exists. It was featured just this year in the Wall Street Journal. Attached is a copy of my report card, which defines the school as a precursor to Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegone where "the women are strong and all the children are above average." Grading was confined to two designations: "Satisfactory" and "Needs To Improve." I received all Satisfactories. Little did they know.

"We moved from Hollyridge Drive to the La Belle Tour, an apartment hotel in Hollywood. John Charles Thomas lived there too, but of greater interest to Jack and me was the penthouse apartment rented by Laurel and Hardy. We never actually saw them, but we would regularly push the elevator "PH," ride up, and look around. The hotel was just blocks from Grauman's Chinese Theater where famous actors and actresses would put their hands and feet in concrete. I would walk to see the activities, which were many and memorable at that time. Mickey Rooney and Charlie McCarthy were "installed" that summer.

"Some of the greatest films ever produced were in the process of being created or completed in 1938: *Gone With The Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Good-bye Mr. Chips*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, *Jezebel*.

"Perhaps my mother was caught up in the same momentum, as she made her stage mother effort to get me into the movies – *Our Gang* to be more specific. We actually met with the producer, Hal Roach, who claimed to like me, could probably use me, but (was it an excuse, while true?) he was currently out of production. Family rumor also holds that an effort to make me Mickey Rooney's understudy was also attempted, but I don't remember that. I do remember meeting at the Fox Studio, Shirley Temple, then at the height of her popularity. She is exactly four months older than I am.

"Probably more memorable in the light of later developments was most of a day spent with Ronald "Dutch" Reagan. Reagan was a good friend of my two uncles, Dite and Hi Myers, and my mother. They had all spent many hours at the Moonlight Inn in Des Moines, and Reagan was toastmaster at Hi's bachelor party. He had only recently moved to Hollywood but was close to being engaged to Jane Wyman. The only thing I remember was asking

him if he "really smoked Kentucky Club pipe tobacco" which he confirmed. (Note: I did not know to ask if he inhaled. But in one of his biographies he said that he did not. He gave up the habit for jellybeans when his friend Robert Taylor died of lung cancer.) Casting for the film, *Knute Rockne*, was in process at the time, and Reagan was picked for the ever-memorable role of George Gipp. Pat O'Brien, who played Rockne, helped select Reagan for the part. O'Brien's wife was Eloise Taylor, a graduate of North High School (Des Moines)! Reagan's brother, Moon, married Bess Hoffman, also from Des Moines and a graduate of Drake University. Iowa was always viewed by Reagan as his adopted state and, in many respects, he was more of a native son than Hoover.

"Reagan, of course, would sadly never remember these, or for that matter many other, events. Some would argue that he was one of our best Presidents, and history may give him this honor. Certainly, he was easily one of our best liked. There are many who would "win one for the Gipper," myself among them."

When I learned of the assignment of this year's first pow-wow paper, I thought this superficial view of Reagan might deserve to be revisited. I approached this subject with some trepidation, realizing that this audience would be filled with outspoken detractors who would find much to support their view and especially if they read only from those arguments that resonate with their own. There is a lot of this material "out there:"

"All presidents feel insulted. All presidents *are* insulted. Reagan was more insulted than most.

"They called him stupid. They called him warlike. They called him unsophisticated, lazy, a mere actor, and a cornball blowhard who believes in

a mythic America that never existed. Clark Clifford, the Democratic Party mandarin and adviser to every Democratic president since Harry Truman, told a Georgetown gathering at Pamela Harriman's house that Reagan was "an affable dunce." The putdown became famous. Tip O'Neill called Reagan's mind "an absolute and utter disgrace." He said Reagan worked only three to three and a half hours a day, and 'It's sinful that this man is president of the United States.' Andre Faulds of the British Labor Party called him "that incoherent cretin." Congressmen said that when they tried to talk about complex defense issues, he only wanted to talk about movies like *War Games*. In 1984, the *Chicago Tribune* called Reagan ignorant and said 'his airheaded rhetoric on the issues of foreign policy and arms control have reached the limits of tolerance and have become an embarrassment to the US and a danger to world peace.' The famous journalist t David Broder said the job of Reagan's staff is to water 'the desert between Ronald Reagan's ears.' Henry Kissinger told a group of scholars in 1986 that when you meet Reagan you wonder 'How did it ever occur to anyone that he should be governor, much less president?' The columnist Jimmy Breslin called him senile and said that when America applauds Reagan they prove 'that senility is a communicable disease.' Breslin also called him 'shockingly dumb.' Eleanor Clift of *Newsweek* said that 'greed in this country is associated with Ronald Reagan.' Sarah McClendon, the White House reporter for *USA Today*, said at the end of his presidency that 'it will take a hundred years to get the government back into place after Reagan. He hurt people: the disabled, women, nursing mothers, the homeless.' Lesley Stahl of CBS News said a few days before the end of Reagan's second term, 'I predict historians are going to be totally baffled by how the American people fell in love with this man.' Jimmy Carter forces in the 1980 presidential race portrayed him as a mad bomber. The great Hollywood director and actor John Huston called Reagan 'a bore' with 'a low order of intelligence,' who is 'inflated and egotistical.' Huston did call him cunning, but said it was 'not

animal cunning, human cunning. Animal cunning is too fine an expression for him.'" (Noonan, p248)

Frankly, I "bought in" to much of this argument. I eat lunch regularly with a group who, in the Carter/Reagan election, saw fit to support John Anderson as I did. I regret this, not only for the wasted vote on this wasted candidate but also because of my disloyalty, a trait I do not respect.

Reagan left office with the highest ratings of any retiring president, many of whom before and since left the office in disgrace. Still, there were several discrediting books and articles, best exemplified by Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History* (published during the Clinton administration). One commentator said, "I can remember when sleeping with the President only described cabinet meetings." Johnson predicted that Reagan's legacy would "fade into oblivion." But then, he also celebrated the economic superiority of Japan, Europe, and the Far East. His description of a declining America makes me wonder if he was one of Carter's speechwriters.

But was Johnson on hand for the renaming of Washington's national airport or one of its largest office buildings or for the christening of the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan? (And still around – maybe the Camp Dodge swimming pool!)

Who got it right?

Ronald Reagan voted for FDR four times and for Truman. While still a Democrat, he voted for Eisenhower and for Nixon. He became a Republican with the Goldwater candidacy, and his televised fundraising speech began the launching of his political career. Lifting, without attribution, phrases coined by Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Churchill, he declared:

"You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We can preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we can sentence them to take the first step into a thousand years of darkness. If we fail, at least our children and our children's children, can say of us we justified our brief moment here. We did all that could be done."

The speech raised \$1 million overnight for the foundering Goldwater campaign. David Broder called it the "most successful political debut since William Jennings Bryan gave his "cross of gold" speech. Reagan's next step was to become California governor but, before reviewing his political triumphs and his limited defeats, let's focus on Reagan the man because the results emanate from that personality.

Reagan's gifts as well as his failings as a politician are often attributed to the fact that he began as an actor. Actually, he began as a journalist, and his first year-round employment was right here "on campus" where he was an interpreter of sports events. Some think it an insult to call a president an actor and Reagan was dismissed as just that. But most successful presidents, including three at the top of historians' list – Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt – all had histrionic interests. Lincoln was killed pursuing this interest. But the key, always, is to be an "actor" without being a "phony" – without being insincere, inauthentic, not your true self.

Reagan did this; so did JFK. Nixon never learned; he couldn't act, his oddness always came through. Nor did Carter, whose smallness seemed to come through. Johnson was too big and too vivid and didn't always seem truthful; the first Bush was awkward, didn't really know how to dance and made the mistake of thinking he didn't have to. Clinton could dance, and though he was a compelling figure and riveting, he was, by the end, seen even by his friends as more a gifted phony than a gifted actor.

One of the great visionaries in American presidential history was Ronald Reagan. Though he had a well-deserved reputation as a president with a limited attention span and little patience for detail, he was at the same time a master of the big picture. He left no one in the country with any doubts about his commitment to liberating the economy and social institutions from federal control through sharply lower taxes, reduced spending on domestic programs, and less regulation, and he was equally resolute in his intention to defeat Soviet Communism through an arms race that could break its fragile economy. Vividly describing his domestic program of economics as producing a "Reagan Revolution" and declaring Moscow the center of an "evil empire," Reagan impressed Americans as a visionary leader comparable to the greatest of his predecessors in the Oval Office.

Reagan's personal charm, which played so vital a role in his widespread appeal, has largely been lost from view. Still, his deftness in making his presidency a statement of a grand conservative design – a design that he was often able to put into effect – will resonate through history. Entering the White House after nearly two decades of mixed presidential records marked equally by sporadic success and ineffectual stumbling, if not outright failure, Reagan restored hope that, in the right hands, the presidency can work and the country can find effective means to deal with its problems. Where Johnson's missteps in Vietnam and Nixon's misdeeds in Watergate destroyed their capacity to fulfill their commitments to a Great Society and detente, respectively, and where Ford and Carter lacked the vision or understanding of politics that could translate into great presidential leadership, Reagan held consistently to an idea of America that captured the public's imagination and encouraged people to believe that the country was getting back on the right track. (Dallek, p23)

Reagan saw the world in simple terms of good and evil. He didn't bother to familiarize himself with the complex details of public policy. His governing style was unorthodox: he delegated a lot and spent much of his time "acting" the role of president. The key to understanding Reagan is that he was not successful in spite of these traits but because of them. We are slow to acknowledge his greatness because we expect our leaders to be deeply reflective people, people who take their responsibilities seriously, downplay the ceremonial aspects of government, and work diligently to master the complex details of public policy. Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter fit this description; they have been failed or only mediocre presidents. The case of Reagan, who was vastly more successful, compels us to rethink our views about what makes a good leader. (Souza p224)

Unlike Nixon whose intelligence was "cramped by paranoia," Reagan, possibly with less intelligence, had a humanity that made up for anything he lacked. He was the first truly cheerful conservative, and to quote Gary Wills: "America is a country that does not recognize itself unless it sees, in the mirror, a confident face looking back at it." (Wills p ix)

His cheerfulness reached an unbelievable level following his shooting. He was closer to death than people realized. He was even able to joke about it: "Honey, I forgot to duck" and to the ER staff, "Are you all Republicans?" He turned this tragedy into a powerful force. Contrast this with the presidency of Jimmy Carter when inflation, unemployment, and interest rates were double digit and OPEC held sway over the U.S. economy. He lectured the public to lower its expectations and spoke of a "malaise" in which he blamed Americans for his own leadership failures.

Reagan's greatness derives in large part from the fact that he was a visionary, a conceptualizer who saw the world differently from the way it

was. He was focused on the future. Vision gives a leader not only destination but also conviction. It relies less on intelligence than on moral imagination. Reagan makes public arguments not as a matter of "window dressing" but of constant analysis. He sold substance, not appearance, just as an advertiser sells a product not the slogan. Gary Wills claims, "A failure to grasp this has misled those who think that Reagan does not have a good mind. It is not an abstract or speculative mind, nor is it an administrative or managerial mind. But it is a very keen intelligence of the Rosser Reeve sort." (Wills, p384). Rosser Reeves developed the term "unique selling proposition."

Despite Reagan's overwhelming amiability, he did not develop close relationships much to the disappointment of numerous associates. And Reagan himself admits to this deficiency. Nancy was the only and far from perfect (in this respect) exception. Nancy could provide the basis for a still separate debate. She was not, in my opinion, the dragon-lady as some depict her. She was, however, a tigress in protecting her husband. She saw those who approached him as having an agenda. She had one item on hers: Ronald Reagan. She did not influence policy. She did, however, influence personnel selection but not as much as many think. Reagan was the first divorcee in the White House; however, this marriage demonstrates the most endearing couple in the presidency of any in my lifetime, an achievement in itself. As parents, they were less remarkable.

When Reagan announced in 1994 that he had Alzheimer's disease, the "wise men winked at each other and exchanged meaningful looks." But there is no factual basis that he exhibited any symptoms during his presidency, and he was frequently examined by doctors. Even among those who were on hand and would have enjoyed saying he was showing signs of the illness, there is

unanimity that no signs were there. The most reliable witness in my view was Howard Baker who said "absolutely not."

REAGANOMICS

Whenever the economic results of the Reagan administration are described as inadequate or negative, his critics call it Reaganomics. Positive results are described by those same reporters as "luck." Reagan told the White House Correspondents Association that "It's my job to solve the country's problems, and it's your job to make sure no one finds out about it." He added later that a Keynesian economist is "someone who sees something happen in practice and wonders if it would work in theory."

Reagan's legacy must be judged against the conditions that he faced upon election. By any measure, his record is astonishing. When he came to office in early 1981, America was on a downward spiral in economic well being and global influence. The most serious domestic problem was inflation, which had been accelerating since the 1960s and reached double digits in the 1970s. At the 12 percent rate of 1979-1980, inflation promised in the space of a few years to double the prices of basic goods and cut in half the value of savings accounts and pension plans. Prices changed so fast that a single piece of merchandise often carried several price stickers, and in a grocery store it was a common sight to see an elderly shopper on a fixed income reaching to the back of the shelf to find items still marked with the price of three months ago.

In the election year of 1980, interest rates peaked at 21 percent, the highest since the Civil War, making it difficult for many families to buy homes. Hardest hit were those who didn't have jobs at all. Unemployment and poverty rates were high. Productivity was down. Economic growth had

ground to a halt. Consumer confidence was at low ebb. It was the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

When Reagan left office, inflation was no longer a problem. The inflation rate plummeted during his first term, averaged 3 percent during his second term, and remained low under his successors. Interest rates fell to single digits. Housing starts were up. Gas prices dropped steeply, and the oil crisis ended. After the recession of 1982, the economy went into a seven-year-period of growth, the largest expansion in American peacetime history. Nearly 20 million new jobs were created between 1983 and 1989. At a growth rate of 3.5 percent, the gross national product increased by nearly a third. The stock market more than doubled in value. Both poverty and unemployment rates declined. The United States reaffirmed its position as the world's preeminent economy. It became the vanguard of technology at a time of breathtaking progress.

In his 1976 campaign against President Ford, Jimmy Carter had developed a concept called the "misery index," the sum of the inflation and unemployment rate, to show the depth of economic hardship. The failure of the Carter presidency is encapsulated in a single statistic: the misery index rose from around 13 percent under Ford to more than 20 percent under Carter. By contrast, the misery index fell by more than half, to under 10 percent, during Reagan's tenure. In 1992, economist Robert Barro issued an economic report card for presidents, based on who did the most to boost economic growth and reduce inflation, unemployment, and interest rates. Of eleven presidents from Truman to Bush, Reagan ranked both first (for his first term) and second (for his second term). Objectively, Reagan's record on this score is the best of all the postwar presidents, including Clinton.

(D'Souza p25)

Although Reagan's economic ideas may sometimes appear vague and uncertain as to how to achieve his objectives, he was clearly committed to a traditional American boosterism, a belief that if only free enterprise can be liberated, the country will achieve a strong rate of growth with rising standards of living for all. He believed that his thinking on taxes applied to people in all tax brackets: The more government takes in taxes the less incentive people have to work, whether as a coal miner or an executive. Moreover, the principle applies as well to corporations and small businesses. At the level of taxation that existed when he took office -- the top marginal tax rate was 78% -- I would surely agree. It would seem to me, however, that at a substantially lower level of taxation, the incentive to work remains.

The tax cuts resulted in cuts at all levels of income and an increase in income at all levels. The top 5% of income earners who paid 35% of the treasury tax in 1981 bore 46% by 1988, and the percentage has grown still further. (There is more, however, to that story as I discussed in an earlier paper entitled: *If You Are So Rich, Why Aren't You Smart?* and I will revisit it again shortly.)

This remarkable result occurred for a simple reason: sharply lower marginal tax rates gave many Americans a greater incentive to move their money out of tax shelters and into the productive economy and also to work harder and produce more wealth. Thus their total income rose, and even though their marginal rates were lower, they ended up paying more to the IRS. Yet if this seems obvious today, it was considered a bizarre line of reasoning by Reagan's critics. Consequently these results were anticipated by only one group, the supply siders, who said, based on the Laffer curve, that a lower tax rate would, for those in the higher tax brackets, produce greater government tax revenues.

Critics of supply-side economics, including some conservative skeptics, have tried to discredit the doctrine by attributing to supply siders in the Reagan administration the view that a reduction in tax rates would produce an overall increase in government revenues, so the tax cut would “pay for itself.” This obviously didn’t happen, but no prominent supply sider said it would, and neither did the Reagan administration, whose budget projections, available for inspection in public documents, all show an expected loss in revenue due to the tax cuts. Indeed, the expectation that tax cuts will increase total government revenues is based on an obvious misreading of the Laffer curve, which clearly specifies that beyond a certain point, marginal tax rates become prohibitive, and reductions for those taxpayers alone can be expected to increase the share of government revenues collected from that group. Tax data from the Reagan years have thoroughly vindicated the Laffer curve. (D’Souza p116)

There were other seldom-discussed developments. The 1980s saw the greatest outpouring of private generosity in history. Americans who contributed about \$65 billion (as measured in 1990 dollars) in charity in 1980 gave more than \$100 billion annually by the end of the decade. Moreover, it was greater than the growth of expenditures on personal extravagances like jewelry purchases, eating out, and health club memberships. (D’Souza p119)

And another development: by the mid 1980s, there began a wave of tax cutting in other countries. They were introducing economic and taxation policies based on ours – not only cutting taxes but reducing the regulation of business and stimulating a turnaround like ours. The most notable was Great Britain, led by Margaret Thatcher.

The 1981 tax cuts, together with the 1986 tax reforms, when combined with defense spending, blew up the budget deficit \$1.7 trillion, a formidable sum and as much as all other previous years combined. The defense budget alone, which was the major factor, grew from 3% of GDP to 6% of GDP. The following is not meant to dismiss deficits as a good thing. At some point, the money has to be paid back. If a nation keeps borrowing, interest payments begin to put a serious strain on the federal budget and begin to crowd out other spending. The good news is that the sizable deficit became the first and only effective restraint on government spending! As a result of economic growth and spending restraint, the deficit declined considerably, shrinking to 3% in 1988 which is about where it was when Reagan first took office.

What is truly interesting is that many of the dire consequences of the deficits predicted by the journalists, economists and the intelligentsia never came about. Warnings of escalating interest rates and runaway inflation never came to pass; in fact, they improved drastically and continued to do so even up until today. Moreover, America's balance sheet its asset values grew from 17 trillion to 34 trillion during Reagan's administration and are substantially higher today.

Clinton advocates would like to take credit for the surplus, which developed during his administration. Even recent interviews with Hillary indicate as much. Do not believe it. Two key factors contributed: The first was the "peace dividend," the drying up of the military buildup (the deficit of 1.5 trillion of the Reagan years matches almost exactly the cost of the buildup). More important was the revenue source which was made up almost entirely of capital gains generated by the burgeoning economy. Ross Perot elected Clinton to his first term. Reagan made possible his second.

The logic of budget deficits and their effect often escapes me as it does many. They are certainly nothing new. In the past 70 years, we have experienced deficits in over 60 years. Deficit critics often cite two arguments: One is that deficits cause interest rates to increase by so-called "crowding out" borrowing. The problem with this thinking is there is no evidence to support. In fact, most evidence points in the opposite direction.

The other argument is that a formidable burden will be placed on future generations. During the 1980s and 90s, millions of middleclass Americans disappeared into the ranks of the affluent. Moreover, there was a veritable explosion of wealth at the very top end of the spectrum. In 1980, there were too few billionaires to count. Today, Forbes Magazine has trouble crowding them all into its pages. By 2050, at least \$40 trillion will "cascade down the generational falls." Shifting the burden to future generations may be less of a problem than is suggested. The question may not be whether these grandchildren can pay, but whose grandchildren!

This transfer of wealth may not be entirely "equitable." It runs the risk of creating an inherited aristocracy, a result which troubles Gates, Soros, and Buffet. Frankly, it might have even bothered Reagan. But I doubt most of you would agree with that point.

To be sure Reagan was as dismayed as his critics for the substantial deficit increase. But he believed it could not be given a higher priority than his cold war strategy, nor his tax cuts. It would be dealt with later and only successfully when Congress is required to balance the budget and our presidents are given a line item veto. Meanwhile, his supporters would view the deficit as the greatest and most worthwhile loan since Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase.

ENDING THE COLD WAR

Early in Reagan's first year in office, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) whose members manned airport control towers threatened to strike. PATCO had supported Reagan's election but had signed a sworn affidavit not to strike. Although Reagan believed an increase in their wages was justified, the union demanded an increase of 100%, which would have cost taxpayers \$700 million when they struck. Reagan gave them 48 hours to return to work or their jobs would be terminated. Despite the formidable political risk, Reagan fired all who did not return to work (70%), over 11,000 of them! And it worked. Foreign governments saw that the new president meant what he said and that he would take a hit in public opinion to make his point. The most important result of this episode was that the Soviet Union saw how the American president dealt with a national security issue and that his rhetorical toughness could be matched by tough action. George Shultz, Reagan's most effective Secretary of State, said that the PATCO decision was the most important foreign policy decision Ronald Reagan ever made. (Noonan, p226)

In early 1981, Reagan told the students and faculty of Notre Dame (The Gipper returns!) "The West won't contain communism. It will transcend communism. It will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written. He repeated this theme in a subsequent speech before the National Association of Evangelicals, often cited as the initial "evil empire" talk.

Reagan was not the first with this pronouncement. Truman had always called it the "Godless communism," but Reagan gave it a new crusading fervor. My own first reaction was one well fed by the journalists and intellectuals: It was very possibly saber rattling. However, as I read more

on the subject, there became no doubt in my mind. Russia, as demonstrated throughout the 20th century and maybe before, was clearly evil.

What distinguished Reagan was his unflinching, unquestioning commitment to the destruction of the creed. Whereas liberals, and even many conservatives like Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon, resigned themselves to the permanence of the Society bloc, initiating the military, political and cultural program of "detente," Reagan resigned himself to nothing. With that stolidity that critics would dismiss as a lack of wit or sophistication, he determined early on and throughout his career to destroy the Soviet Union.

Reagan succeeded. To this day, liberal critics refuse to credit him the success, but there it is, foreshadowed and confirmed by mountains of CIA, NSC and Pentagon documents and other White House correspondence. Reagan and key advisors like Harvard professor Richard Pipes had a plan. They would remove or weaken the struts of detente – Western trade and investment in the USSR – and ramp the ever-present arms race up to fiendishly expensive levels to bankrupt Moscow. Reagan built new bombers, submarines, missile systems, a 600-ship navy, and SDI, the "Star Wars" concept of legend. To be sure, he drove America too into the red – but America could afford it, and Russia could not.

As early as June 1980, before he was elected, Ronald Reagan met with a group of editors at the *Washington Post*. Lou Cannon recalled his colleagues expressed grave concerns that Reagan was escalating the arms race. Reagan told them not to worry: "The Soviets can't compete with us." No one shared Reagan's presumption of Soviet economic vulnerability. Reagan assured them, "I'll get the Soviets to the negotiating table." Cannon recalls, "When he said that, nobody believed him."

Reverend Billy Graham, commenting on a trip to the Soviet Union: "In the United States you have to be a millionaire to have caviar, but I have had caviar with almost every meal."

Let us consult a more objective source. In 1982, the learned Sovietologist Seweryn Bialer of Columbia University wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, "The Soviet Union is not now, nor will it be during the next decade, in the throes of a true systemic crisis, for it boasts enormous unused reserves of political and social stability." This view was seconded that same year by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who observed that "those in the United States who think the Soviet Union is on the verge of economic and social collapse [are] wishful thinkers" who are only "kidding themselves."

John Kenneth Galbraith, the distinguished Harvard economist, wrote in 1984: "That the Soviet system has made great material progress in recent years is evident both from the statistics and from the general urban scene ... Partly, the Russian system succeeds because, in contrast with the Western industrial economies, it makes full use of its manpower."

Equally imaginative was the assessment of Paul Samuelson of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a Nobel laureate in economics, writing in his widely used textbook: "What counts is results, and there can be no doubt that the Soviet planning system has been a powerful engine for economic growth ... The Soviet model has surely demonstrated that a command economy is capable of mobilizing resources for rapid growth."

James Reston of the New York Times, in June 1985 revealed his capacity for sophisticated evenhandedness when he dismissed the possibility of the collapse of communism on the grounds that Soviet problems were no

different from those of the United States: "It's clear that the ideologies of Communism, socialism and capitalism are all in trouble."

But the genius award undoubtedly goes to Lester Thurow, economist and well-known author, who, as late as 1989, wrote, "Can economic command significantly ...accelerate the growth process? The remarkable performance of the Soviet Union suggests that it can ... Today it is a country whose economic achievements bear comparison with those of the United States."

Wise men tend to be impatient with dummies, and thus we can understand the tone of indignation with which Strobe Talbott, a senior correspondent at Time and later an official in the Clinton State Department stated, "if the Soviet economy was in a crisis of any kind, "it is a permanent, institutionalized crisis with which the USSR has learned to live."

Equally scornful was Sovietologist Stephen Cohen of Princeton University, who wrote in 1983: "All evidence indicates that the Reagan administration has abandoned both containment and detente for a very different objective: destroying the Soviet Union as a world power and possibly even its Communist system." Further, he described this as wrongheaded and suicidal.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse: "History has an abiding capacity to outwit our certitudes." The wise men may have been wrong, Schlesinger concedes, but then "*no one foresaw these changes.*"

But here is the problem with this view. *The dummy foresaw them!*

There has been in the past decade a determined effort to rewrite the history of the Cold War. This revisionist view has now entered the textbooks, and

is being pressed on a new generation that did not live through the Soviet collapse. There is no mystery about the end of the Soviet Union, the revisionists say, explaining that it suffered from chronic economic problems and collapsed of its own weight.

This argument does not convince. True, the Soviet Union during the 1980s suffered from debilitating economic problems. But these were hardly new: The Soviet regime had endured economic strains for decades, on account of its unworkable Socialist system. Moreover, why would economic woes in themselves bring about the end of the political regime? Historically, it is common for nations to experience poor economic performance, but never have food shortages or technological backwardness caused the destruction of a large empire. The Roman and Ottoman empires survived internal stresses for centuries before they were destroyed from the outside through military conflict.

Through a combination of vision, tenacity, patience and improvisational skill, he produced what Henry Kissinger termed "the most stunning diplomatic feat of the modern era." Or as Margaret Thatcher put it, "Reagan won the cold war without firing a shot."

There are two other significant elements of the Reagan Cold War strategy and achievement. The first of these was the strategic defense initiative (I am sure that most of you like to call it "Star Wars"). The other was the Gorbachev relationship.

When Reagan entered office, we had a tacit "agreement" with the Soviet Union regarding nuclear missiles called the MAD policy. Mutual Assured Destruction – the idea of deterrence providing safety so long as each nation had the power to destroy the other with nuclear missiles if one launched a

first strike. This strategy did not send everybody, including Reagan, to bed feeling safe. Reagan felt that since every offense weapon historically has resulted in a defense against it, then it must be possible in this age of technology to invent a defensive weapon that could *intercept* nuclear weapons. This concept was soon thereafter given considerable support by members of the scientific community. This support was far from universal, however. The press and the usual detractors believed it to be a mythical venture. Frankly, I never quite bought it myself. To my view, having a bulletproof vest is not much protection if your adversary can slip an atom bomb into your back pocket. Nonetheless, it was supported even by the Clinton administration and still is.

Its overwhelming importance, however, is that the Soviets believed and were scared to death of its offensive potential. They claimed that Reagan would use it as a bargaining chip. He claimed that it was not and that he would even share our technology with them. But despite his disclaimers, it was a bargaining chip and arguably the most powerful of all in bringing the Soviets to the table and nuclear disarmament.

Regarding Gorbachev, I begin with the thesis which, while not especially profound, is not one I have found stated in my readings: Gorbachev was "created" (for want of a better term) to deal with the Reagan presidency. Clearly, the Soviet traditional maneuvers and strategies were not working with the new American posture. This included the Breznev Doctrine which claimed the right to support "wars of national liberation" and to suppress through armed intervention any challenge to Communist government.

Reagan's one-on-one personal diplomacy and strategy was critical, I believe, in ending the cold war. I can visualize no other president – not Clinton,

Bush, Carter, Ford, Nixon, even Eisenhower but possibly JFK – who could relate to Gorbachev on a one-on-one basis the way Reagan did.

Part of Reagan's legacy is what we do not see now. We see no Berlin wall. He said, "Tear down this wall," and it was done. We see no Iron Curtain. In fact, we see no Soviet Union. He called it an Evil Empire, and it evaporated overnight. Few in Washington and even fewer in Moscow expected that. But Reagan did. Admittedly, Reagan did not accomplish all this by fiat. But it was more than coincidence that the fall began on his watch. Did he spend the Soviet down, bankrupting the system as it tried to respond to his military buildup? Or did he scare them into surrender, with a Star Wars proposal that the Soviets saw as an offensive threat? Or did he take them down greeting Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika with enthusiasm? He did all of the above.

IRAN-CONTRA

On the whole, our fortieth president's convictions and focus on great concepts rather than administrative details, created priorities that were a strength that helped transform our country and the world.

In the Iran-Contra episode, this management style failed him and, in this case, his actions, as perceived, were entirely at odds with the public's image of him. One observer noted upon learning that Reagan had traded arms for hostages, noted that it was "like suddenly discovering that John Wayne had secretly been selling liquor and firearms to the Indians."

Iran-Contra is best discussed in its two parts: Iran and Contra. Reagan entered into the Iran phase of this affair because he thoroughly empathized with the suffering of the hostages and their families. Unlike Nixon, he did not violate the public trust in the pursuit of personal power. Consequently,

he refused to listen to Shultz and Wineberger's warnings to avoid this foolish enterprise. During this segment of the Iran affair, Reagan was personally involved in every stage, and this was not an example of ignoring administrative details. Reagan was quite prepared to take the "heat," some would argue even risk impeachment. Even the independent counsel, Arthur Timan said of him, "The president acted like a president." Regarding this segment, Reagan spoke from the oval office:

"A few months ago, I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not. As the Tower Board reported, what began as a strategic opening to Iran deteriorated, in its implementation, into trading arms for hostages. This runs counter to my own beliefs, to administration policy, and to the original strategy we had in mind. There are reasons why it happened, but no excuses. It was a mistake."

Reagan's approval ratings increased. But the Contra segment was still ahead of him. Impeachment was still in the air. The unknown was the anticipated testimony from Poindexter and North.

Some background to the Contra segment: "Between 1974 and 1980, while the United States wallowed in post-Vietnam angst, nine countries fell into the Soviet orbit – South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, South Yemen, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Grenada, and Nicaragua – topped off in 1979 by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

During the Reagan administration, all this changed. No more nations fell into the clutches of the Soviet bear. Capitalism and democracy began to advance around the world. On Reagan's watch, dictatorships collapsed in Chile, Haiti, and Panama, and nine more countries moved toward democracy: Bolivia (1982), Honduras (1982), Argentina (1983), Grenada (1983), El

Salvador (1984), Uruguay (1984), Brazil (1985), and the Philippines (1986). Fewer than one-third of the countries in Latin America were democratic in 1981; more than 90 percent of the region was democratic by 1989. In Nicaragua, shortly after Reagan's second term ended, free elections were held, and the Sandinista government was ousted from power. (D'Souza p27)

Reagan always thought it was a tragic error for President Kennedy to abandon the Cuban freedom fighters during the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. He saw Nicaragua as another Cuba. His opposition in Congress saw Nicaragua as another Vietnam. Reagan could not develop military support for those he called the Freedom Fighters. Clearly, McFarlane, Poindexter, Casey and Oliver North knew how deeply Reagan felt the need for the Contras' survival as a democratic resistance force. They knew Reagan's frustrations with Congress. I would agree with the argument that this could have impelled these individuals to do what they did. But despite exhaustive research and investigation, not only by the special counsel but also by the sizeable team brought to the White House by Howard Baker, none of whom were about to fall on their swords even for Reagan, there was never any evidence that Reagan knew or approved of the division of funds.

A number of factors kept the president and vice president from being subjected to impeachment proceedings and possible prosecution in the matter. Most critically, there was no smoking gun to hold either man directly accountable, even though more than 50 percent of Americans believed that Reagan knew and approved of the transfer of funds to the Contras. Despite this, the country remained warmly disposed toward Reagan, who it viewed as a great symbolic politician – who took a limited part in daily affairs and left the administration of government to subordinates. After the presidential failures of Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter, few Americans were ready for

another bloodletting at the highest political level. Finally, however troubling the skulduggery and crimes, Americans were hesitant to bring a president before the law for trying to prevail over extremist regimes in Teheran and Managua, however unscrupulous his means. (Dallek p82)

Bob Woodward asked Lawrence Walsh, the independent counsel, "How will Iran-contra be remembered in history?"

"I think it'll be remembered as a non-sordid disregard of constitutional restraints," Walsh said. "I think the president was wrong, he was defiant, he was deliberate, but he wasn't dirty."

A GREAT PRESIDENT?

Perhaps I should have inserted the following comment early on. I do not think it necessary to accept the Republican agenda (which I don't) or even parts of the Reagan agenda (which I don't) to give a positive evaluation of Reagan's presidency. Moreover, this paper is not about current politics. There have been comparisons made of W. Bush and Reagan. The most extensive was in the January 26th magazine section of *The New York Times*. I hasten to comment: I knew "Dutch" Reagan (or at least my mother did), and W Bush is no "Dutch" Reagan. The most obvious difference: Reagan won his election by the most overwhelming margin in history. And Bush? They are still counting the votes!

Robert Dallek, an historian who has written biographies of several presidents, has written a new and instructive analysis of what it takes to be an effective president. His book, *Hail To The Chief, The Making and Unmaking of American Presidents*, develops five criteria qualities found in those who have effectively fulfilled the oath of this office: Vision; pragmatism (that is the recognition that politics is the art of the possible); consensus; charisma; and

trust. In my judgment, and mostly in Dalleks, Reagan receives the highest marks in each of these categories.

I could find ample testimony to support this conclusion among almost all of those who served with and for Reagan, but I thought it might be more meaningful to review the remarks of those from whom you would least expect confirmation.

Sam Donaldson, whom Reagan called the Ayatollah of the press:

“He came to Washington to change the world and for the most part he did.... I miss him.”

Edward Kennedy who opposed every Reagan initiative during the 1980's, told a Yale University audience in 1989:

“Whether we agree with him or not, Ronald Reagan was an effective president. He stood for a set of ideas. He meant them, and he wrote most of them, not only into public law but into the national consciousness.”

Henry Kissinger, Reagan's old nemesis, observed that

“It was Ronald Reagan's presidency which marked the turning point of the final disintegration of the Soviet empire.”

Perhaps the most surprising comments came from Dan Regan. When news that Reagan had selected Howard Baker to replace Regan leaked to the media, Regan was furious and humiliated. He hadn't formally resigned. He sent the president a one-line resignation letter and stormed out of the White House, not to return. Regan's ouster destroyed his friendship with the president. It was the bitterest event of his life. Despite this episode, Regan could say:

"Ronald Reagan was elected as the fortieth President. Never for a moment did I doubt that the people were right in their judgment of him. Elsewhere in this book I have compared him to Franklin Roosevelt and to Harry Truman, and while I realize that this must infuriate many admirers of those two great men, I believe that history will find the comparison valid. Like Roosevelt, Reagan changed the political landscape of the United States – and the way in which Americans saw themselves and their country – in a fundamental and probably permanent way. Like Truman, he was perceived by his critics to be unqualified for his office, an accidental President from whom little could be expected.

"A generation from now, Reagan's sound judgment and good instincts in large issues will be more clearly seen and better understood. If he is remembered, as evidently he wishes to be, as the American President who banished nuclear arms from the world, then he will be a great figure in history indeed, and the very qualities for which he was derided in his own time – instinctive rather than intellectual judgment, simplicity of vision – will be the ones that made greatness possible.

"Although the reader can hardly be in any doubt about it at this point in the story, I wish to state that my admiration for Reagan as President remains very great."

Before I ask you this question, "Was Ronald Reagan a great President?" I feel impelled to ask this one as well, "Compared to whom?"

SEPTEMBER 15, 2003
POW-WOW PAPER
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Now I can tell you, I have known Ronald 'Dutch' Reagan 1940

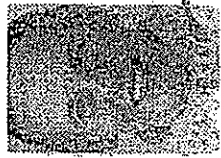
At long last, the speeches and debates are behind us and we have elected Ronald Reagan as our President for the next four years.

I was tempted to mention in my column my association with Ronald Reagan, but I felt it was unfair to my newspaper to show a political preference before the election.

Many newspapers come out endorsing the candidate of their choice, and I have never thought it was a particularly good thing to do. My thought is that they should tell all the news, and facts about a person running, and then let the voter make his or her own choice, from the information given them.

Now that the election is over, I can speak candidly about Reagan. I have known him since he was a young man, living in Des Moines, Iowa. That was before television. He was a sports announcer on radio. Most people know the story of how he went to California to cover the Rose Bowl game by radio, and Warner Brothers discovered him and hired him for movie roles.

I HAVE KEPT IN TOUCH with Ronald Reagan



Longboat Key

By TINEFEVERILL

over the years because a long ago recognized him as a truly outstanding person. I have letters written to me, and he signed them "Dutch," -- the nickname his father gave him as a youngster. And for some of his close friends he is still called "Dutch."

There is so much I could tell of Ronald Reagan -- I suppose I should write a book -- but I will refrain from all the details, but just tell you that the United States of America is fortunate to have this outstanding man at the head of this country.

Now, get busy "Dutch" and get some of these things we are looking forward to being accomplished.

JAY KIRSCHENMANN and I will be guests on Ella Marie Sullivan broadcast, WQSA, 1220 on a radio dial Thursday from 8 to 4 p.m.

THE LONGBOAT YOUTH CENTER will hold an annual breakfast at Shenkel's on Saturday, Nov. from 8 to 11 a.m.

This program provides the Youth Center with income, and the people of Longboat should cooperate with the youngsters selling the tickets. The tickets are \$3.

The goal for the sale of these tickets is \$3,000 there will be prizes for the children who sell the most tickets. First prize is \$50 gift certificate for Trophy and Sports World. Second prize is a \$25 savings bond from Freedom Savings and Loan. Third place is 10 silver dollars from Ellis Longboat Key Bank.

There will also be a garage sale at the Youth Center on the same day. Anyone having items they wish to donate will be greatly appreciated. Just let the Youth Center and let them know what you wish to donate.

RONALD REAGAN
PACIFIC PALISADES

October 29, 1964

Mrs. Harry Peverill
2735 Gulf of Mexico Drive
Sarasota, Florida 33577

Dear Tine,

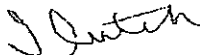
Just a line between speeches to tell you how good it was to hear from you.

I am glad to hear that we are all on the same side. I feel sure we can win.

Moon is on the plane with Barry in charge of television, so I guess that puts all of us in the fight.

Again thanks and best regards.

Sincerely,



Ronald Reagan



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 6, 1981

Dear Dite:

Your letter certainly makes me regret that I couldn't attend the luncheon in Des Moines. I know that Moon enjoyed himself and, were it not for my official schedule, it would have been a great pleasure to harmonize and reminisce about our good times at the Moonlight Inn.

Please thank Tine for sending the clipping and for her hard work and support. I hope she is enjoying Sarasota, and I understand it is very pleasant there.

With best wishes to you and Marge,

Sincerely,

Dutch

Mr. Dwight L. Myers
1909 Somerset Lane
Northbrook, Illinois 60062

