

Who is ronald  
reagan?



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born February 6, 1911 in Tampico, Illinois to Edward and Nelle Reagan (History. com Staff, 2009). Reagan grew up with his entire life spent in Illinois and attended Eureka College (History. com Staff, 2009). As a young adult Reagan had Democratic views, campaigning for Democratic candidates.

As time passed his views became more conservative and by the 1960's he was officially a Republican (History. com Staff, 2009). In the mid 1960's, Reagan set out for his first race in public office, running for the Governor of California. He was elected governor from 1967 to 1975, serving two terms (History. com Staff, 2009). Shortly after, Reagan was elected the 40th United States President in 1981, winning against President Jimmy Carter (History. com Staff, 2009). Reagan ended up serving two terms as President, ending his presidency in 1989. During this time, he was often referred to as the Great Communicator (History. com Staff, 2009). The major events that impacted Reagan's presidency were his ability to cut taxes (known as Reaganomics) to reduce the impact the federal government had on American's pocketbooks, increase defense spending by building up U. S. weapons and troops, and he negotiated a nuclear arms reduction agreement which resulted in a quicker end to the Cold War (History. com Staff, 2009).

## Contents

Ronald Reagan was known to be a man of optimism, amiability, graciousness, and a remarkable politician. He was able to connect with the average middle-class citizen, which was not an ability all presidents and leaders had. His ability to do this eventually earned him the title of the Great

Communicator (Procon. org, 2018). He had previous experience with radio, television, film, advertising and public relations. It was an era in which politics focused on media and images, attracting more public appeal (Raphael, 2009). In the end, this was great for Reagan's own character and image. It gave him the ability to exploit his political authority. In his inaugural speech, he focused on government being the problem rather than the solution. This was somewhat appealing or pleasing to the people of the United States. He presented the concept of a new revival to the America's and picking up what was left behind from the previous administration. And while he was a republican, Reagan was popular with conservatives as he lacked the political baggage of a being part of a discredited Washington establishment (Cannon, 2018). He had a comprehensive vision with clear direction. He believed in law and order, he had a willingness about him, and he was open to compromise knowing that he would not abandon his ideas of certainty and confidence.

Prior to Reagan stepping into the political spotlight and announcing his candidacy for president, people did not understand his principles, power, or political skills. He was entering a time when the winds of change were blowing in the direction of conservatives (Cannon, 2018). The New Deal coalition that was brought about by President Roosevelt in the 1930's was still the dominant political movement, but was unraveling as time passed, especially during the Vietnam War (Cannon, 2018). Although, even after the Vietnam War had seized, the United States global power was still waning (Drury, 2014). In the midst of all this, there was an oil shortage that was depressing the economy and Iran government was holding 52 Americans

hostage (Drury, 2014). There were multiple reasons for the people of the United States to doubt the security and strength of their own nation but yet they had faith in Reagan to turn our country around.

Throughout Reagan's presidency, he experienced many criticisms from the American people. Often these weaknesses or criticisms are better remembered than his successes. During Reagan's presidency and even after his death, his weaknesses and criticisms are recognized by the people of today. Reagan's economic strategy (Reaganomics) was not well looked upon, despite his intention being to decrease the amount of money that was taken out of the people's pockets. His tax reductions and the tightening of interest rates led to a period of economic growth, but they were also accompanied by a record-breaking growth in the national debt, the federal budget deficit and the trade deficit (Cannon, 2018). While this is true, the increase in the debts and deficits of this time were likely due to the massive increase in military spending that Reagan was doing to help strengthen the United States Military, increasing the military spending by 7.2 billion dollars (Kleinknecht, 2010). Once the military was well-defined, the increased spending declined and thus the federal budget deficit and national debt decreased. In terms of the tax cuts implemented, they did not produce the additional revenues that were predicted.

Aside from the economic standpoint, Reagan also received some criticism surrounding his priorities in terms of the AIDS epidemic, civil rights, and unions. Reagan was not very responsive to the AIDS epidemic in terms of leadership. The disease which was first reported in 1981 by the Centers for Disease Control, however, President Reagan did not make public comment

on the AIDS epidemic until 1987, 6 years later (Toner & Pear, 2004). This significant delay thwarted the research and education that was needed on this subject which was detrimental to the American people in understanding what this disease was and how it could be prevented. Reagan was also known for decreasing health, education, and social welfare programs. A total of 41.4 million dollars were cut from these programs resulting in 400,000 households being removed from food stamps alone (Kleinknecht, 2010). It has been said that Reagan broke the New Deal notion that government could — and should — be an instrument of social equity (Toner & Pear, 2004). Reagan thought that the poor and middle-class societies were better served by his ideas of economic growth than with government programs. This arrogance, so to speak, gave him a reputation for being a mean spirited individual rather than the caring individual he portrayed himself to be. In the midst of these cuts, Reagan wanted to make a positive impact on the environment. However, the people of the United States fought back stating that people without jobs, houses, income, support, etc. could not very well support a healthy environment without these vital necessities in life (Troy, 2005).

Similarly, his policies on civil rights were not well thought of. He vetoed to extend the reach of civil rights laws in 1988 as he thought it was unnecessary to expand the power of the federal government (Toner & Pear, 2004). This, however, should have not been surprising given the low number of black individuals that voted for him both in 1980 (11 percent) and in 1984 (9 percent) (Toner & Pear, 2004).

As noted previously, shortly upon entering his presidency there were American hostages in Iran. His tactic to free the Americans was to trade arms with Iran. In his efforts to do this he received much criticism noting that he violated the Arms Export Act as well as the Hughes-Ryan Act of 1974. He was going against or neglecting the American Constitution, knowing that this did not fit with his own convictions and beliefs. He had to use negotiating tactics that were not typical in order to keep peace. Even so, he was viewed upon by the public as bargaining with a terrorist (Piffner, 2013). He ultimately broke his own vow to not make deals with terrorists, although, we would come to find that it would be of benefit to the United States.

Regan received many criticisms throughout his presidency. However, we must not forget what he contributed to the United States and the impact that he had. While much of his tax efforts were criticized, specifically his economic tactic, Reaganomics, it was very successful in many aspects. Reagan was able to reduce the inflation rate from 12.5 percent to 3.9 percent and was able to decrease interest rates from an astounding 21.5 percent to 3.9 percent (Siracusa & Coleman, 2002). He also succeeded in reducing the marginal income tax rate which was 70 percent when he took office after the Carter administration to a staggeringly low 28 percent when he left office (Cannon, 2018). These efforts and successes were key in creating a stronger economy. He proved that decreasing tax rates results in stimulated economic growth, activity, and boosts tax revenues with the government revenue income tax rising from \$244 billion in 1980 to \$446 billion in 1989 (Procon. org, 2018). Reagan's economic strategy also resulted in a 7.5 year long (1982-1990) economic boom with expansion in the gross

domestic product (GDP), increased employment opportunities, and the stock market averages increasing. While he was criticized for cutting education and health programs, he did make positive changes as well. He increased the budget for the Department of Education by \$6 billion dollars over the course of a 3-year time span and signed the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), which is still in effect today (Procon. org, 2018).

From a military and foreign policy perspective, he was also successful, despite the criticisms in terms of breaking the constitution. He did view the Soviet Union as an evil empire and ordered for the wall of communism to be tore down, but even so, he did have a good relationship with their leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (Drury, 2014). He even at some point considered his relationship with the Soviet Union as the center of foreign policy. It was his opportunity to work towards nuclear safety and close the window of vulnerability (Siracusa & Coleman, 2002). While in negotiations with the Soviet Union, there were approximately 700, 000 people that rallied against nuclear weapons (Troy, 2005). He presented the United States as a country that was a steadfast to terrorists and communism. He increased defense spending in order to increase our country's defensive power but was the first president to agree to an arms reduction treaty with the Soviet Union (Drury, 2014). Despite the rallies and his firm stance, it did not result in a reduction of nuclear weapons. Although, with his strong relationship and negotiating abilities with Mikhail Gorbachev, he was able to reduce the Cold War tensions that ultimately ended the war sooner than it may have otherwise. He strived to keep his promise of negotiating peace and fostering a changed political idealism by better defining national security measures and ensuring

more opportunities for peace between countries that would last through time. The Reagan administration also funded research and development of weapons systems such as stealth technology and precision weaponry (Procon. org, 2018). This was one of his greatest defense hypes costing \$1. 5 trillion over a period of 5 years (Siracusa & Coleman, 2002). This effort resulted in larger training facilities, military pay increases, and even helped to revitalize the military after the Vietnam War.

In 1982, he implemented the War on Drugs that helped to decrease the casual drug use that was also lingering from the previous administration. He increased the funding for this program from \$1. 5 billion in 1981 to \$2. 75 billion in 1986 (Procon. org, 2018). In addition to this, he also signed multiple executive orders related to crime and justice including the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, Nation Narcotics Leadership Act of 1984, Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and 1988.

## Conclusion

There is really a lot to be said about Reagan's presidency that cannot be possibly covered in this short paper. He was a highly criticized president but did make positive changes in our country that have left a legacy. The take away is that every president and/or leader will have strengths and weaknesses, even making errors. But even so, we need to look at the tools and resources that were provided and political and economic climates that are at hand. Reagan was able to restore the confidence of the American people through many of his speeches, but more so by his actions. Reagan



truly is a political legacy that has had successors following in his footsteps since he first stepped foot as president into the White House.