The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order

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It is not easy speaking favorably about Ronald Reagan in Minnesota—the only state that never voted for him even once. But perhaps, had the voters here a chance to try again, Minnesota could pull up with Massachusetts. A poll taken last August by ABC News found that Ronald Reagan is more popular with the American people today than at any time during his presidency (his approval rating is nearly 70 percent), while a recent Gallup Poll found that among eighteen- to thirty-year-olds, Reagan is rated as our nation's greatest president by a small plurality. To liberals dispirited by these findings, I can only say that it serves you right for running down all those dead white males like Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln.

But this helps explain why Reagan is getting the silent treatment right now from liberal intellectuals, who manifestly failed in their attempts during Reagan's presidency to do what a generation of liberal intellectuals and historians did to Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover back in the 1940s and 1950s. Liberals tend to dominate historical writing. Arthur Schlesinger's classic trilogy ***The Age of Roosevelt*** not only lionized the New Deal but also built upon a savage attack on the conservative presidents and policies of the 1920s. I got to thinking a few years back that the time had come to return the favor: hence my new book, ***The Age of Reagan.***

It is becoming clearer with the passage of time that Reagan belongs next

to Franklin Roosevelt as one of the most consequential presidents of the twentieth century, which means that Reagan's story deserves to be told in broad-gauge terms and in a style commensurate with the story of FDR and the New Deal.

Like ***The Age of Roosevelt*** and similar classic narratives, ***The Age of Reagan*** inhabits the borderland between history and biography. It seeks to place Reagan in a larger political and social context. Winston Churchill noted the necessity of capturing a subject's wider context in his four-volume account of his ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough: "In a portrait or impression the human figure is best shown by its true relation to the objects and scenes against which it is thrown, and by which it is defined."

I can summarize the argument and the action of my 800-page book in two sentences: This book explains ***why*** Ronald Reagan became president in 1980, rather than merely ***how. Reagan was the right man for the moment, but the coming of that moment needs to be explained.*** Although Reagan had been thinking and speaking seriously about political questions since at least the late 1940s, he might not have been an especially successful or compelling politician had he embarked on a political career in the 1940s or 1950s (when, ironically, the Democratic Party had been asking him to run for Congress from Los Angeles). But by 1980, Reagan's particular insights and skills were ideally suited to the attenuated condition the country had reached amid the collapse of the moderate liberal consensus that had dominated American public life throughout the postwar era.

And so my narrative proceeds along two tracks. While the book recounts the political odyssey of Reagan that starts in 1964 with his famous speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater, it also contains a general chronicle of the main political events of the country, always taking pains to relate Reagan's place in these events, or to set up how these events affected Reagan's subsequent ascent.

The Crackup of Liberalism

Liberalism cracked up amid the failures of the twin wars of the 1960s—the War on Poverty and the war in Vietnam. The failure of both, I argue, can be traced to a common intellectual root, and should not be viewed, as they have been in most conventional histories up to this point, as separate and distinct phenomena. "In the early 1960s in Washington," Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan reflected later, "we thought we could do anything. . . . The central psychological proposition of liberalism is that for every problem there is a solution." An assistant secretary of defense said that "the new knowledge can literally solve any problem." It would only become apparent later that, as Moynihan put it, "***the government did not know what it was doing.***"

A close examination of the new liberalism that arose in the mid-1960s brings to light how it differed from the older liberalism of the New Deal. The New Deal was in many ways a large civil engineering project, while the

new liberalism of the Great Society was a huge ***social*** engineering project. It is astounding to go back carefully through the historical record of the time and see serious, intelligent people like Sargent Shriver in 1966 declaring that poverty would be completely eliminated in America within a decade. Why should social science be any more difficult than rocket science? Those of you who were around at the time may recall a popular cliché: "Any country that can land a man on the moon can solve the [fill in the blank] problem."

The older liberalism was optimistic, confident, and forward-looking. Above all, it was realistic: think of the hard-headed liberalism of Lionel Trilling or Dwight Macdonald or Leslie Fiedler or George Orwell—leading liberal intellectuals of their day who are nearly forgotten today. One has to admire the confidence and strength of this older liberalism, and regard as tragic its hubristic decay. Today's liberalism often seems pessimistic, excessively sentimental, and even reactionary—witness the refusal of most liberals to consider even the tiniest trial of school choice, or even to discuss meaningful reform of Social Security or Medicare.

Large generalizations are always hazardous, but consider: the Kennedy years offered us the political economy of "growth liberalism," as it was called. Within a decade, however, liberalism came to embrace the idea of "limits to growth." It was a stunning about-face; within the space of a decade, the central governing challenge for liberalism changed from allocating abundance to rationing scarcity, and it was disastrous for liberalism. Its effects linger on to this day.

Indeed, it can even be argued that had not Vice President Gore so fully associated himself with the "limits to growth" outlook in his book ***Earth in the Balance,*** he would likely be president today, because he would not have lost the state of West Virginia. Even Jimmy Carter and Michael Dukakis carried West Virginia; it is very difficult for a Democrat to lose West Virginia, but Al Gore found the one way to do it. Hubert Humphrey never would have embraced a policy that threatened the livelihood of so many unionized workers.

Or consider John F. Kennedy's great and enthusiastic challenge in 1961 to go to the moon before the decade was out. It is worth noting that Eisenhower and many Republicans were distinctly unenthusiastic about a government space program, which again left the field open for a large-scale public initiative that captured the imagination of the world. When we indeed reached the moon in 1969, many prominent liberals had turned against the program, remarking that while the moon landing was impressive, we would have been better off spending the money to "fix the cities" and for social programs on Earth. (The total cost of the moon landing, by the way, was equal to about three months' worth of social spending in 1969.) Liberalism had been overcome by small-mindedness.

Pat Moynihan confirmed this intellectual decay when he acknowledged in 1973 that "most liberals had ended the 1960s rather ashamed of the beliefs

they had held at the beginning of the decade."

The Nixon Years and the Coming of Reagan

The Nixon years are important because conservatives and many middle-of-the-road Americans held out great hope that Nixon would provide a bulwark against, or agent for the reversal of, the excesses of 1960s liberalism. Despite his intentions to be exactly this, the immensely talented Nixon has to be judged to have been a great disappointment if not a failure, though not because of the catastrophe of Watergate. Government spending and economic regulation grew faster under Nixon than under Johnson; the number of pages in the ***Federal Register*** (the roster of federal rules and regulations) grew 19 percent under Johnson, but a staggering 121 percent under Nixon. Indeed, some of the most problematic advances of the administrative state occurred under Nixon, by Nixon's initiative.

In addition to assaying these problems, my book examines the complicated relationship between Nixon and Reagan, and the striking contrast between how they confronted the issues of the time. The lesson of Nixon's failure, which might be called a tragic failure for reasons both obvious and more subtle, is that it was going to require someone of more intransigent political character to work a change in America's political direction.

The third section of the book examines the attenuation of détente under both Presidents Ford and Carter, the near miss of Reagan's 1976 campaign, and how Reagan redoubled his efforts to prepare to run again in 1980. Perhaps the most interesting thing I learned in researching the book is the extent to which Reagan was preparing seriously to be president during the years between 1976 and 1980—probably more seriously and intently than any presidential candidate of modern times. Among the most salient aspects of this period was Reagan's rallying to his cause a number of prominent Democrats, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick and Max Kampelman, who would have held senior posts had there been a Hubert Humphrey administration in 1969. This is a considerable indicator of how dramatically the nation's political life was changing by 1980.

The Man and His Moment

And so by the time we reach 1980, we find the man and his moment meeting. It is very difficult today, in the midst of our national confidence and prosperity, to recall how dismal was the nation's outlook in the years immediately preceding Reagan's election.

Time magazine's Henry Luce had famously declared in 1940 that the twentieth century was "the American century." By 1980, much of the elite believed that the American century was over. "The whole country seemed slightly traumatized on the brink of the '80s," ***Newsweek*** magazine said. "There was also a growing sense that the country's institutions and leaders were no longer up to managing the problems that were simply too complex to grasp."

Time thought the same: "From the Arab oil boycott in 1973 onward," ***Time*** essayist Lance Morrow wrote in January 1980, "the decade was bathed in a cold Spenglerian apprehension that the lights were about to go out, that history's astonishing material indulgence of the U.S. was about to end."

The number of Americans who told the Gallup Poll that the country was on the wrong track hit a new peak of 84 percent in August 1979; 67 percent agreed with the statement that the United States was in "deep and serious trouble." All of this pessimism reached a climax in the summer of 1979, when President Carter delivered the worst presidential speech ever made to the American people, the so-called "malaise" speech. Carter had run for president in 1976 promising "a government as good as the people." Now, in 1979, he said that the people were no good.

The only prominent American who rejected this pessimism wholesale was Ronald Reagan, and this is why he was the only man for the moment. Although the economy and foreign affairs were the main front-burner issues in the extraordinary campaign of 1980, the subtext of the entire campaign was American decline.

I finished writing this book in the first week in June 2001, and it began arriving in bookstores on Monday, September 10. So much for timing. Lots of people have been asking me how Reagan would have responded at the present moment, and whether anything in my book or the legacy of Reagan bears on the case at hand.

The legacy of Reagan for our present moment can be seen in how Americans have reacted in the aftermath of September 11, and how different has been the mood after this than after the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979–80. Although the hostage crisis was of lesser magnitude, it was in some ways a greater insult: it was a lingering outrage that festered week by week. But in that crisis, the nation's sense of powerlessness and pessimism dominated public consciousness; there was a brief surge of patriotism, but no spontaneous outburst of flag displays. Our alternative symbol was those stupid yellow ribbons, inspired by a song infinitely less sustaining than "God Bless America." There wasn't much we thought we could do, and above all we feared the death of the hostages, and American troops, if we did try to take forceful actions.

Uncertainty about what the "cowboy" Ronald Reagan might do helped to unfreeze the crisis. Immediately after the election in 1980, a joke began to circulate widely: What's flat as a pancake and glows in the dark? Iran after Reagan becomes president.

Reagan's unpredictability surely entered into Iran's calculations in deciding to resolve the crisis before Reagan took office in 1981.

Today the national mood is palpably different than it was in 1980.

A New Kind of Generation

Our more robust mood at the moment goes deeper, I think, than just the difference in circumstances. All of this occurs in the context of the

increasing interest in and celebration of what we call "the greatest generation." Especially among baby boomers, there is a sense that even if we do not have to take up arms by the millions as our fathers and grandfathers did, still we may be able to share in the resolve and seriousness of purpose that is worthy of the greatest generation.

This might seem unremarkable, until you recall that in the 1960s the baby boom generation was asserting that ***it*** was the greatest generation, and much of the adult establishment rushed to affirm this grandiose pretension. This was at the heart of the much-celebrated "generation gap" of the time, which was the first cousin, or maybe the bastard twin, of the "credibility gap." In 1966 ***Time*** magazine selected the "under 25 generation" as its "Man of the Year" instead of a single individual. "This is not just a new generation," ***Time*** wrote, "but a new kind of generation. With his skeptical yet humanistic outlook, his disdain for fanaticism and his scorn for the spurious, the Man of the Year suggests that he will infuse the future with a new sense of morality, a transcendent and contemporary ethic that could infinitely enrich the 'empty society.' "

This was absurd, of course, but it was only the beginning. The Cox commission that was formed after the sacking of Columbia University in 1968 concluded that "the present generation of young people in our universities is the best informed, the most intelligent, and the most idealistic this country has ever known. . . . Today's undergraduate and graduate students exhibit, as a group, a higher level of social consciousness than preceding generations."

They are trying to tell us something, the elites kept saying. All you needed to do was read the signs and banners the students put on display at Columbia to realize that what they were telling us is that they were moral imbeciles.

Even the Nixon administration unwittingly contributed to this genre of affirming the moral superiority of the younger generation. After the eruption of the campuses after the U.S. incursion into Cambodia in 1970, Nixon appointed a commission, headed by former Pennsylvania governor William Scranton, to investigate and report on campus unrest. The Scranton report was just as risible as the Cox report three years before, finding that the "counterculture" was the repository of "high ideals," whose members "stress the need for humanity, equality, and the sacredness of life." The student protesters represented a "new culture," rebelling against their "elders entrapped by materialism and competition . . . prisoners of outdated social forms."

Then there was Woodstock, where adult elites once again rushed to confer transcendent meaning on an overgrown music festival. The ***New York Times*** thought Woodstock was "essentially a phenomenon of innocence," while ***Time*** chirped that Woodstock

> may well rank as one of the significant political and sociological events of the age. . . . The revolution it preaches, implicitly or explicitly, is

> essentially moral; it is the proclamation of a new set of values. . . . With a surprising ease and a cool sense of authority, the children of plenty have voiced an intention to live by a different ethical standard than their parents accepted. The pleasure principle has been elevated over the Puritan ethic of work. To do one's own thing is a greater duty than to be a useful citizen. Personal freedom in the midst of squalor is more liberating than social conformity with the trappings of wealth. Now that youth takes abundance for granted, it can afford to reject materialism.

Busting the Boomers

The one person who spoke out forcefully against this tide of approbation of youth culture was, of course, Ronald Reagan. He did this with his usual mixture of humor and toughness. In his standard after-dinner speech during the campaign of 1970, he liked to joke: "I had a nightmare last night. I dreamed I owned a Laundromat in Berkeley."

But Reagan also knew all along which was the greatest generation. In testimony to the House Education and Labor Committee in 1969, Reagan argued, "The leaders of today's so-called establishment did not have to listen in a classroom lecture or make a field trip to the ghetto to learn about poverty. We lived it in the depths of the Great Depression. The horrors of war are not just a subject for a term paper to a generation that sent its finest young men to fight at Omaha Beach."

If there was a "generation gap," it was entirely the fault of the younger generation. To the contrary of both Nixon and the New Left, Reagan asserted:

> We have been picked at, sworn at, rioted against and downgraded until we have a built-in guilt complex, and this has been compounded by the accusations of our sons and daughters who pride themselves on "telling it like it is." Well, I have news for them—in a thousand social science courses they have been informed "the way it is not." . . . As for our generation I will make no apology. No people in all history paid a higher price for freedom. And no people have done so much to advance the dignity of man.

In other words, as in so many other issues, Reagan was twenty years ahead of Tom Brokaw and Stephen Ambrose, and once again the country is catching up to Ronald Reagan. Had Walter Cronkite, for example, published "the greatest generation" in 1970, it would have been greeted with howls of derision. And if you think I overstate this case, take a closer look at what might at first appear to be the strongest counterexample from the time: the Oscar-winning movie ***Patton,*** which could be said to champion one of the leading figures of the greatest generation. In fact, the producers of ***Patton*** considered calling the film ***Patton: Portrait of a Rebel*** to appeal to the youth market and antiestablishment mood of the time. Patton was clearly intended in the film to be understood as a nonconformist, a rebel against the unimaginative conformism of his peers.

What I think has happened in the last decade or more is that the baby boomers who were caught up in the pretensions of youth culture in the 1960s and 1970s have come to recognize, in the more mature reflections of middle age, and as their parents begin to die off, the emptiness of their youthful pretensions, and also the quiet dignity and grandeur of their parents' generation—hence this effusiveness we see today for the greatest generation. This helps explain the depth of feeling in this country in the aftermath of September 11, and why it differs so markedly from the public mood of the Iranian hostage crisis. We owe it to Ronald Reagan, more than to any other single person, that we have come to this moment in this way.

Following his speech, Steven Hayward took questions from his American Experiment audience.

What role did religious faith play in Reagan's life?

That's a tough question. Conservatives criticized him for almost never going to church while he was president. He told a couple of reporters that he didn't want to disrupt the service—when a president goes to church, an entourage of TV cameras follows, and it makes a mess of Sunday services. But he could have had a chaplain come to Camp David or the White House.

A lot of people said his religious faith was insincere, but it's more likely that it was, like many other aspects of his life, deeply private. He may also have been reacting to Jimmy Carter's wearing his religion on his sleeve, which I think annoyed Reagan at some level.

My hunch—and it's really only a hunch, because he was such a private man in so many ways—is that religion was deeply important to him. We know that he took seriously the biblical notion of Armageddon and the end times, which frightened liberals to death because they thought maybe it was on his mind to deliver Armageddon.

There's a view that Reagan was a hard-core conservative, yet he seemed to be pragmatic—how did he mesh the two?

He understood, as any practicing politician does, that you need to make certain accommodations—you trim your positions here and there—in the service of getting elected. He never wanted to tilt at windmills. He wanted to win. He always kept his eye on what was central and most important. So when he ran again in 1980, for example, he quit calling for abolishing OSHA because it upset the labor unions and he was trying to attract labor union votes, which he did quite successfully. That was in the service of getting elected, because he had more important objectives in mind.

What was Ronald Reagan's relationship with resurgent liberalism in the form of political correctness, feminism, civil rights as a kind of civic religion, and so forth?

That's also tricky. In my book, I quote Shelby Steele, who wrote a couple of years ago that Reagan won the Cold War but didn't win the culture

war. I think that's right. This is a pregnant question: the relationship between politics and culture. Reagan moved to the right on a lot of those issues as they were building up steam in the 1970s. For example, in about 1970 he wrote to a feminist organization to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment and encouraged them to use his name as a supporter. He didn't change his mind until Phyllis Schlafly and others pointed out to him that this seemingly innocuous amendment would be a hunting license for activist judges.

Reagan attacked "moral permissivism" starting early in the 1960s. It's difficult for a president to affect cultural trends through executive action, along with all the other things he was being assailed for and trying to do at the same time. The ferocity of the liberal attack on his Cold War policies and his arms control approach to the Soviet Union and then Central America was enough to keep anybody preoccupied.

Also, the worst parts of political correctness manifested themselves after his time in office. But it's an excellent question and it's important for judging the time we live in. People ask me: Can you really say this is the age of Reagan and the liberal order has fallen? Political victories are never absolute. Franklin Roosevelt never got all he wanted. Reagan's massive achievement was to derail the liberal monopoly on public life in America, so it's now closer to a fair fight. That's something that makes liberals angry and grumpy these days.

Even in the academic community, eventually the evidence becomes overwhelming and the inevitable must be conceded. A couple of recent biographies of Barry Goldwater reach the conclusion that perhaps he was not evil incarnate. Is there a similar reassessment of Ronald Reagan, both as a person and as president, going on?

The interesting thing about the Goldwater books is that they're written by liberals. The book by Rick Perlstein, a writer for ***The Nation,*** is terrific. Why is it that liberals are writing really good books about our heroes? Why can't ***we*** do it? Reagan's case is trickier, because he was president. Since Goldwater didn't succeed, he could be regarded as a curiosity; liberals can look upon him with a certain amount of benign amusement. Reagan is harder because he has had a lasting impact.

I suspect that in the fullness of time, liberals will resume their attacks on Reagan as a surrogate for attacking aspects of conservatism they don't like today. On the other hand, it's important not to underestimate or slight liberals who are generally fair-minded and honest. Academic historians are surveyed every year, and in their 1989 and 1990 ratings of presidents, Reagan was way down at the bottom. The most recent survey I saw has Reagan in the top ten. He is climbing, Truman-like, in esteem, even among liberals who don't like his policies. If you look at what he set out to do and what actually happened, that record is pretty good, even if you don't like the way he went about doing it.

In Singapore, they seem to have eliminated poverty with some very conservative principles. But you seem to imply that it was hopeless to think we could win a war on poverty. Aren't there some countries that have eliminated poverty with conservative principles?

You need to allow for massive differences in social structure. Singapore has a fixed population; they don't have much immigration, and they don't have any of the problems we've had with ethnicity or the deep culture of poverty we have, especially among the African American community. That's what makes our country different.

But my point is that the architects of the Great Society just charged ahead, thinking that getting rid of poverty was simply a matter of money and administrative organization. As Moynihan warned at the time, we really don't know much about how this works. We don't know what the incentive structure is. We don't know if we're doing more harm than good. All that was waved aside in a pell-mell rush to get rid of poverty in ten years, and we thought it would be easy.

Moynihan's idea, by the way, was to put people to work by giving them [government] jobs. The funding mechanism was going to be a five-cent-a-pack cigarette tax. Johnson himself and others said they didn't want handouts or make-work jobs; they wanted to change the social structure of poverty. Moynihan's idea probably would have been better. It would have been more like the New Deal. It would be better to at least make people do something that resembles real labor than to mess with the social structure of neighborhoods.

One of the turning points for me was when Reagan stood firm against the air traffic controllers union. Obviously, one of the reasons he was elected was that he was so effective with that blue-collar, union group, yet when he went against the air traffic controllers, I thought he was crazy. I thought he was going to lose, and destroy his base in the process. Yet that never happened.

The great irony of the air traffic controllers is that the union had endorsed him for president. That's one reason they thought they could get away with it—they thought a politician they had endorsed would at least deal with them. That happened in, I think, July of his first year, and it deeply impressed the Soviets. They realized that he was serious and tough. Calvin Coolidge said there's no right to strike against the public interest. Part of Reagan's appeal to organized labor was the view that inflation was clobbering working-class Americans, even with cost-of-living increases in their contracts. They thought he was the guy who could do something about it. He made a lot out of the fact that he'd been a union president—he's the only union president we've ever had as president of the United States.

How will Reagan's death affect historians' view of him, and public perception of him? Are we going to see additional books on his presidency? It seems fairly unusual that he's still living, yet he's so popular. Is he only going to get better once he dies?

Right now, the trend is in his favor. An interesting barometer of this is Lou Cannon's book ***The Role of a Lifetime.*** About two years ago, a new edition with a postscript came out. Cannon goes all the way back with Reagan to the mid 1960s, when Reagan ran for governor and Cannon was a reporter for the ***San Jose Mercury News.*** Cannon ended up following Reagan to Washington and the ***Washington Post.*** Reagan made Cannon's career.

Cannon always took Reagan seriously, but throughout his book, you see two things: notes of disapproval of Reagan's conservatism, and a certain condescension that you see among all media people—I must be smarter than he is. How can I take this ex-actor seriously? That comes across in subtle ways in Cannon's book.

The new postscript represents the changing thinking of people who take Reagan more seriously. It's a glowing account of how successful Reagan was, in hindsight. Reagan left office with the prospect of huge budget deficits, the Cold War was still going, and we were still fighting over arms control. And yet, within what in historical terms is a breathtakingly short time, our biggest fiscal problem was budget surpluses, and the Berlin Wall came down, against all expectation. Cannon says that, looking back now, those big deficits that Reagan gave us in the 1980s begin to look like the wartime deficits of the last campaign of the Cold War and, therefore, a historical bargain. I think that is the right way to think about it.

In your book, you talk about Reagan's and Moynihan's similar backgrounds, and how they became very different because they went to different parts of the country. Can you talk about that?

I borrowed this from Moynihan's biographer, Godfrey Hodgson, who points out that they both had alcoholic parents, they're both Irish, they're both from the Midwest. But Moynihan went east, ultimately to Harvard, and joined the academic and intellectual elites of the East Coast. Reagan went to California in the 1930s and joined the entrepreneurial culture of the Southwest. I do think that the regional and cultural differences explain a lot; they have changed over the years, but back then they were quite important.

There's a famous article by James Q. Wilson about a trip to Reagan country—it's one of the classic articles about Reagan—published in ***Commentary*** in 1967. Wilson says the entrepreneurial culture in California explains the way people vote and think in the Southwest and predicts the sunbelt phenomenon that we came to see in the 1970s.

I asked Wilson about that article once and he said, "I proposed the article to Norman Podhoretz for ***Commentary,*** and Podhoretz said, 'Oh my God, you're not proposing to endorse Reagan, are you?' " Wilson said no, he just wanted to explain why Reagan won, and since he [Wilson] was a native Californian now teaching at Harvard, he was ideally suited to explaining Reagan to incredulous Easterners. Wilson said in the article that he didn't sympathize

with Ronald Reagan and even if he had, he wouldn't have written it where his Harvard colleagues would have seen it.

You know where Wilson is today? He's the Ronald Reagan Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University.

Who were the conservatives who influenced Reagan, and where did Goldwater fit?

There has always been purported to be sort of a mystery about how Reagan changed from being a liberal Democrat. He described himself as nearly a bleeding-heart liberal, but that's not quite accurate. He was a Truman liberal. He campaigned for Harry Truman in 1948. He campaigned for Helen Gahagan Douglas, whom Nixon called the Pink Lady in the Senate race of 1950.

But also, as president of the Screen Actors Guild, he saw firsthand quite a serious attempt of the Communist Party USA, which was getting money from Moscow, to infiltrate and control Hollywood studios. Reagan got threatening phone calls and carried a gun for a while. I think that began a process of thinking about what communism really represented. I think he came to recognize the blind spots to liberalism, both in international affairs and then domestically, and began to follow a sequential logic that led him to abandon his liberalism.

A lot of people said it must have been Nancy's father, a very conservative medical doctor, who influenced him. When someone asked him about it in the mid 1970s, he said, "I persuaded myself." During the 1950s when he was traveling the country, speaking to General Electric factories, he talked to real workers. For a very long time, even after he became governor, Reagan was afraid to fly, so all those years he was doing the GE tour, he was riding the train, where he started reading classical liberal conservative authors and libertarian authors: Henry Hazlitt's ***Economics in One Lesson,*** Hayek's ***Road to Serfdom,*** Von Mises. He marked up the books and started using their thoughts in his speeches.

The Goldwater thing is interesting because there was always a certain distance between the two of them personally. I don't think Goldwater was a huge influence on Reagan, and I think Goldwater was always a little jealous of Reagan's popularity. Reagan gave that great speech that was televised in '64 and everyone said how wonderful Reagan was. At that point, Goldwater was understandably tired and discouraged by the way he had been treated and how badly the campaign had gone. Nancy says that Goldwater never even sent Reagan a thank-you note for doing the speech. I don't know if that's true or not. There was always a certain distance and a little bit of friction between them when Reagan was president. It's an interesting story that's hard to get at.

Do Reagan's comments on the evil empire and [George W.] Bush's "axis of evil" represent a common worldview?

I met then–Governor Bush three or four years ago down in Austin, and it struck me then and strikes me now that

George W. Bush's model for his presidency is Ronald Reagan and not his dad. He ran on a tax cut, which was very Reaganesque. Dumping the Kyoto Treaty against the onslaught of all the editorial pages and the environmental movement was a grand thing to do that tracks very closely Reagan's 1981 dumping of the Law of the Sea Treaty, a very bad treaty that had been years in the making. A few weeks into the Reagan administration, Secretary of State Al Haig was telling Reagan we needed to ratify that treaty because it had been negotiated in good faith by previous administrations, and Reagan said, "Al, I thought we won the election."

The "axis of evil" remark in the latest State of the Union speech parallels very closely the evil empire, which, as you remember, just tore up the liberal pea patch. They were apoplectic about Reagan saying that. But, on the other hand, do you really want to be on the side of the argument that says the Soviet Union is not evil—or that Iraq and Iran and North Korea are not evil? In addition to probably getting the geopolitics of this right, that also is a direct assault on the moral relativism of our time, which does not want to acknowledge evil in any plain way. Bush is doing a fairly reasonable imitation of Reagan, and good luck to him. ■