



Ronald Reagan's Legacy

By Rod Blum

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I never had the privilege of meeting former President Ronald Reagan in person. But I always felt a connection to him through his daughter Maureen Reagan, whom in 1996 I had the good fortune to have dinner with. She was every bit as charming and engaging as her father, while looking very much like her mother, actress Jane Wyman. Most memorable from our time together was when I asked her what she thought her father's biggest political asset was. She replied, "His political opponents always underestimated my father". I asked her why she thought they did. "Because he was a Hollywood actor who didn't attend a prestigious Ivy League university" she responded.

Indeed few Presidents have been as consistently underestimated as Reagan. He was viewed with considerable disdain by the Washington establishment because he was one of us – a patriotic, genuine man with a moral clarity grounded in Christianity and a deep belief in American exceptionalism. He believed in freedom, lower taxes, smaller and less-intrusive government, a strong defense and traditional American values – all positions that resonate with Joe the Plumber.

The 1970's were dreadful - a time of rampant inflation, communism on the march, and Jimmy Carter's incompetent handling of the domestic economy at home and the American hostage situation in Iran. Many Americans lost hope and felt our best years were behind us. Then Ronald Reagan took office in 1981. During his extraordinary eight years in office he revitalized the economy, defeated the Soviet Union without firing a shot, appointed constructionist judges who abide by the Constitution and most importantly, got government off the backs of citizens and revived the American spirit – all while contending with a Democrat controlled House of Representatives.

His economic policies set the stage for a twenty-five year free market expansion - ending price controls, deregulating industries and slashing tax rates. The so-called "misery index" - unemployment plus inflation – had reached 21% by the end of Carter's term. By the end of the Reagan presidency, it had plunged to around 9%. Americans of ALL economic stripes were better off during this economic renaissance – proving John Kennedy correct when he said; "A rising tide lifts all boats."

One could argue that Reagan's triumph in leading the U.S. to victory in the Cold War - the Soviet Union collapsed one year after he left office - was a greater victory than Franklin Roosevelt's in World War II, because Reagan won the Cold War with half of the American establishment against him. And he did it without any loss of American lives. Incredible indeed.

Reagan also left a lasting mark on the judiciary. He elevated conservative William Rehnquist to Chief Justice and replaced him with Antonin Scalia. He also appointed the first female to the court in conservative Sandra Day O'Connor. By 1988 Reagan had replaced over half of the federal judges with conservative constructionist judges, who interpret the original meaning of the Constitution.

Perhaps Reagan's greatest accomplishment was assuring us that it was morning again in America – he renewed our faith in America and each other. Reagan truly believed in America and the American people. He understood that the solutions do not lie with government or politicians - rather answers can be found by looking to the American people. As Reagan once said: "You can see heroes every day going in and out of factory gates. Their values sustain our national life." Reagan didn't promise to do great things for us. He showed us that great things came from within us. This is truly the essence of Ronald Reagan and his legacy. I miss him.