

SOOTHING ECHOES FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE.

REAGAN'S VISION OF THE WORLD

BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

Laura Garcés, 1994.

“I knew Jefferson. He was a friend of mine.” Ronald Reagan
at the Republican Convention, August 17, 1992.

“Reagan gives our history the continuity of a celluloid
Mobius strip. We ride its curves backward and forward at the same time and
he is always there. There is an endlessness of surface that becomes a kind of
depth... Reagan’s image precedes us when we ride forward or backward in
time, anticipating our reactions, reflecting us back to ourselves, stirring
‘memories of the future’”. Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America, Innocents at
Home*, p. 371.

What makes the presence of myth in Reagan's vision of the world such an appealing subject, one indeed thoroughly examined already by historians? Many reasons, superficial or profound, could be invoked. First, of course, the man himself, and his amazing destiny. For any outside observer, Reagan could indeed appear to be the incarnation *per se* of the American dream of success. Or so it seems as he recollects the principal stages of his life in his Memoirs. After living a healthy, sporty childhood, happy despite his modest background, Ronald Reagan went to Eureka college, which "represented everything I had dreamed it would be and more," (1) and, a few months after his graduation in 1932 found a job as

radio announcer: "It was a fantasy come true" (2) His wishes after that would continue to be blessed, as he became actor, made a late arrival on the political scene, and finally, was elected 40th president of the United States. In his Memoirs, Reagan seems to attribute his exceptional luck to the American dream. "What an incredible country we lived in," he wrote, "where the great-grandson of a poor immigrant from Ballyporeen could become president." (3) For the outside observer, he did indeed embody the American myth. Yet, on second thought, Ronald Reagan seems more difficult to be captured and defined. Is it mere coincidence that he happened to be President of the United States as the Soviet empire began to decline, a circumstance that makes us regard him as a realist, a pragmatist who succeeded in what previous administrations had failed, namely in implementing policy strategies that inevitably led to Moscow's demise? Testimonies about him are contradictory. His erstwhile rival Gorbachev in 1988 publicly acknowledged his realism. (4) Others denounced him as a "great pretender", dismissed his policies as fantasy, or as such an intertwining of myth making and policy making that it becomes "increasingly difficult to disentangle fact from fiction". (5) Some, finally, implicitly slighted his personal contribution, choosing to regard him as "the culmination of a century of linguistic and political evolution." (6) Rich with

nuances, the exhaustive biography of Lou Cannon frequently points at Reagan's propensity to fantasy, something that often exasperated his entourage, but balances it against Reagan's pragmatic and conservative disposition. (7) He notes, moreover, discrepancies between Reagan's rhetoric and his inclinations. (8) A more complex, or less transparent, character therefore emerges from the descriptions of those who knew him best, beginning with his wife Nancy. (9) In fact, Reagan himself revealed the gap between his role and what this image projected, when he intrigued his audience by remarking that acting had represented an indispensable asset for his presidency. (10) Reagan's reluctance to arbitrate conflicts between his collaborators renders it even more difficult to ascertain his position.

Dismissing Reagan's delving in myth and fables as trivial, naive, or even irrelevant, precludes us from understanding Reagan's particular vision of the world and of his nation as an indivisible and perpetual *mélange* of fact and fiction rather than as a thought-out perspective flawed by inconsistencies. Charges that he deluded himself and substituted an imaginary world for reality imply a logic that Reagan's world evades. Instead, his intuitions and personal views often outweighed whatever political philosophy may have inspired him. How else can one explain his receptivity to the head of the "evil empire" after the 1985 fireside

chat in Geneva? Or his suggestion in July 1981 that the heads of states meeting in Ottawa communicate openly and freely what they had on their minds, without following any strict agenda? Empathy for Marcos' adverse fate after the elections of February 1986 also appeared to outweigh considerations on the socioeconomic and political conditions in the Philippines. His motivation to intervene in the Iran crisis is said in the same vein to have been mainly the rescue of the hostages. (11) Apart from personal incentives, it was his vision of the nation that for him determined reality, so that stigmatizing him for wandering off into the world of fiction may make us fail to see that Reagan tried more to stretch reality to meet his ideals than to anchor his dreams in real life. It was his particular way of espousing the myths of America, of answering concrete dilemmas by evoking symbols that made him, as Garry Wills has remarked, "the opposite of the chameleon: environments adapt themselves to him." (12)

Both fantasy and reality coexisted in his vision of the world. It was often the discrepancy between the two that shaped his political initiatives, and that in the end accounts for his controversial legacy. While it is truly difficult - especially in the absence of open archival material - to grasp the precise input of President Reagan in his administration's policies, we can try to understand his aura. The *Great Communicator's* main

contribution was indeed, even if temporarily, to reconcile the nation with its traditional image. Before even beginning his political career, Reagan had shaped the perspective that in the eighties would rescue America's identity sorely tried by the cold war and by political disarray at home. The theme of a hostile outside world as a mobilization and propelling catalyst of U.S. identity is a well-known one. (13) A hostile world that was also intent on subduing the nation. Reagan saw a communist plan operating in Hollywood as early as in the 1940's. (14) It was in the late 1950's that he started to relate international communism and the ever-growing governmental intervention in the lives of Americans. (15) His vision of the nation was inseparable from his understanding of the world. Although still a Democrat at the time, he campaigned for Eisenhower and subsequently for Richard Nixon. (16) His conversion to the Republican party originated in his belief that government interference, as the first step in a Communist plan, was the greatest evil to be feared at home just as on the international scene. He would continue to believe so during his political career. Thus, as historian Robert Dallek notes: "In the eyes of Ronald Reagan and other conservatives, the communism of the Soviet Union represents the end point, the logical culmination of dangerous currents -- big government, atheism and relaxed moral standards -- that they see running so powerfully in America." (17)

This explains that for Reagan as for many others the effort to defend and restore traditional values at home went hand in hand with the fight against communism. (18) In 1965, "Reagan had been publicly talking national issues for ten years, and his political reputation rested far more on the nationwide speech he had made for Goldwater in 1964 than on anything he had ever done in California politics. As a matter of fact, he found it difficult at first to de-escalate his rhetoric from the national to the state level." (19) Just as Communism until 1989 would help to consolidate the energies of the nation on the international level, excessive governmental intervention would always remain Reagan's scapegoat. Thus, the two leading themes that would orient his political career were present in his rhetoric, since the late 1950's.

So was the sense of urgency that he constantly exuded. In his thinking, boundless faith and optimism coexisted with intense misgivings about the future and the outside world. Images of an impending crisis frequently inspired his speeches beginning as early as 1959. (20) The nation was at a turning-point, facing its "rendezvous with destiny." "Wars end in victory or defeat," he asserted ominously in a speech to the Arizona Chamber of Commerce as early as March 30, 1961. "By 1970 the world will be all slave or all free." (21) But in the end the nation's principles would prevail. The struggle pitted good against evil, "the good represented by

religious-based free enterprise democracy, the evil, by godless communism." (22) Biblical references such as the shining city on the hill abounded. Traditional values were constantly present, particularly the settler's conquering spirit and belief. In contrast to Johnson's 'Great Society' suggesting implicitly dedication to the nation as a collective body, Reagan's gubernatorial campaign ran on the slogan 'Creative Society', connoting the individual citizens' capacity of multiplying opportunities. (23)

The political disarray resulting from the crisis over domestic and foreign issues in the sixties and seventies further exacerbated Reagan's portrayal of the international and domestic threats. By the early seventies, domestic and international issues had become the focus of sharp contentions, causing a polarization both in the Democratic and Republican camps. It was the entire scope and direction of Nixon's policies, especially the policy of detente, his triangular diplomacy with China and the Soviet Union and, finally, Watergate, that seemed to alienate the conservatives in the Republican Party. (24) For those whose political affiliation depended on a hard stance against Communism, detente and the opening to China came close to heresy. (25) Others were confounded by what they considered the broad scope of Nixon's social programs at home, and resented that an excessive government interference in the lives of the citizens seemed to

have been tacitly accepted by the Republican Party. (26) Nor was Nixon alone to be blamed for the generalized dissatisfaction, which came to a head with the Watergate scandal. Social issues which had been thrown on the political agenda as a result of the sixties liberation movement were seized upon by all quarters. It was liberalism that gave to a great extent the religious Republican Right its political program, which consisted mainly in an offensive against what it conceived as the corruption of the social fabric by the forces of modernism. The issues of abortion, of school prayer, and of assistance to parochial schools, fed the increasingly powerful political Right's agenda. So did the need to counter the threat of an erosion of family values. Finally, the revolt of students, which resulted in draft dodging and flag burning, awoke apprehensions of imminent anarchy. As the consensus over liberalism eroded, the conservative camp searched for a new identity in reaction to the post-war period: the quest for a new belonging, which was by no means confined to the Republicans but cut across party lines, expressed a new populist fervor directed against an almighty government. (27)

The repudiation of liberalism's legacy went hand in hand with a denunciation of the past two decades which, many deplored, had resolved nothing. Instead, it fuelled the frustration of a "sensation of *déjà vu*, an impression that we are seeing the rerun of a not very good movie ...,"

lamented journalist David Broder as early as 1971. (28) The protesting new voice of conservatism stigmatized the betrayal of post-war administrations, mainly Roosevelt's "surrender" to Stalin at Yalta, what they considered a :stalemate in Korea, and Nixon's detente policies. (29)

Revival, more than deference for tradition, gave the new conservatism its impulse. Reagan not only shared this impulse of renewal, he soon began to personify it. Central to his rhetoric was the recurrent theme of the people's struggle against those "special interests" that had captured government. As he expressed it in a 1977 speech: "Let us lay to rest, once and for all, the myth of a small group of ideological purists trying to capture a majority. Replace it with the reality of a majority trying to assert its rights against the tyranny of powerful academics, fashionable left-revolutionaries, some economic illiterates who happen to hold elective office, and the social engineers who dominate the dialogue and set the format in political and social affairs. " (30)

Reagan's revolutionary fervor came to irritate even some of his conservative allies, such as commentator George Will, who wrote in 1985: "He is painfully fond of the least conservative sentiment conceivable, a statement taken from an anti-conservative, Thomas Paine: 'We have it in our power to begin the world over again.' Any time, any place, that is

nonsense." (31) Reagan, nonetheless, once compared the "anti-tax movement" that began in the seventies to something "much more than an anti-tax movement, just as the Boston Tea Party was much more than anti-tax initiative. " (32) The two heroes whom Reagan quoted most often apart from Paine, viz. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, were indeed very remote from his own philosophical outlook. (33) So was the president whom he claimed as his spiritual father, FDR. Yet one of his most astute biographers, Lou Cannon, observed: "Culturally, he remained a Democrat who drew his metaphors and inspiration from the New Deal. Other Republican politicians spoke to the majority of the electorate as outsiders, trying to induce Democrats to come over to their side. Reagan spoke as an insider". (34) An insider he was, but not strictly speaking of a particular political party, not even of a concrete reality, but of the frustrated yearnings of a disenchanted majority. And the heroes he referred to were symbols, rather than historical characters. Reagan's strand of revisionism was both more solidly anchored in the present and more hopeful than that of other dissenting conservative voices. He continuously instilled the feeling of a new start, as George Will reflected: "the 1980s have been years in which Americans have had the sharp sensations of morning - freshness and sobriety and a second chance. " (35) Rather than dwelling on domestic poverty, he

stigmatized those who received welfare payments and often illustrated his criticism by telling the unfounded story of a Chicago woman who lived extravagantly thanks to such support. (36) He didn't see domestic poverty, but instead boundless opportunity, provided incentives were given to make the poor turn away from welfare and work hard.

Reagan played a role in obliterating the past for the sake of national confidence. He succeeded in marking a clear break from the memory of recent past. In contrast to Carter's "mournful history" (37) who had referred in his nationally televised speech of July 15, 1979 to the "crisis of confidence ... that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will," Reagan declared: "I find no national malaise, I find nothing wrong with the American people. " (38) Instead, what had so recently been the nation's nightmare was transformed into a "noble cause." (39) His optimism even succeeded in giving a positive meaning to moments of catastrophe, as when Reagan saluted the memory of the 101st Airborne Division soldiers killed in a plane crash as well as those who died in space shuttle Challenger. (40) He was also inclined to minimize the gravity of the Watergate scandal. As Lou Cannon remarks, Reagan had defended Nixon in this instance, " declaring in public that Nixon was governing effectively despite Watergate, and in private that he was the victim of a 'lynch mob'

determined to hound him from office." (41) By dismissing the present and the problems encountered by the nation, he was able to evade many of the contradictions of his presidency, as Wills observes astutely: "Even when untoward things happened on his 'watch' of responsibility (if not of control), he was busy convincing people that the future would be different." (42) Less friendly in characterizing Reagan's ability to shake off responsibility for adverse events was Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder with her "Teflon" analogy, an effect which often rescued him, most of all during the Iran-Contra affair. (43) Reagan displayed a peculiar blend of wilsonian idealism and the realism that had provided the base of containment politics. Never mind that his entourage was dismayed by an imaginary scenario he was fond of sketching - that an invasion of beings from outer space would bring about a reconciliation of the United States and the Soviet Union. He would continue to repeat it in public and even to Gorbachev during the 1985 Geneva summit, thus manifesting an inherent belief in the universality of mankind. (44) Because he substituted his faith in human perfectibility to Hobbesian pessimism, he was able to believe in ultimate concord -- a 'Happy Ending' to world conflicts. On the domestic front, his general economic philosophy was supported by an optimistic confidence in the "invisible hand" that would bring economic prosperity to the nation and somehow

balance the budget, despite all evidence to the contrary. (45)

While optimism in matters of foreign affairs expressed the elated mood of his later years as President, on other occasions, particularly until 1984-85, intimidating and often hawkish utterances seemed to forever preclude any genuine dialogue with the Soviet Union. A confrontational attitude well encapsulated in his speech of March 8, 1983, when he referred to the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil in the modern world". (46) In that he was, of course, the product of the Second World War, and his vision of the world was colored by its lessons. He feared the potentially disastrous consequences of a policy of appeasement. (47) Against the Axis powers, against North Korea, or against the Viet Minh and Viet Cong, he deplored not United States involvement *per se*, but any half-hearted commitment of Americans to a cause. "I think, as MacArthur did, that if we as a nation send our soldiers abroad to get shot at, we have a moral responsibility to do *everything* we can to win the war we put them in." (48) Wrong were any timid policy choices in dealing with the Soviet Union and futile any attempts at negotiation except from a position of extreme strength. (49) "Detente" was a "word the Russians had interpreted as a freedom to pursue whatever policies of subversion, aggression, and expansionism they wanted anywhere in the world." (50) Peace would come through dissuasion. "As the foundation of

my foreign policy," he wrote, "I decided we had to send as powerful a message as we could to the Russians that we weren't going to stand by anymore while they armed and financed terrorists and subverted democratic governments. Our policy was to be one based on strength and realism. I wanted peace through strength, not peace through a piece of paper." (51)

Reagan advocated not only defense, but also the promotion of American interests and values. Conscious of the prevalent mood of aloofness, he nevertheless "believed it was senseless, ill-founded, and dangerous for America to withdraw from its role as superpower and leader of the Free World." (52) He was in fact acutely aware of the nation's need for a "spiritual revival", and the objective of exorcizing the Vietnam experience inspired much of his presidency. (53) In his January 1989 farewell address, he would declare that along with economic recovery, "the recovery of our morale" represented a great triumph. (54) In his buoyant call to the nation, Ronald Reagan was reassuring the nation by reverting to the old myth of the American Adam. As historian Vann Woodward has pointed out: "Americans were proving unable to move beyond their deeply embedded concept of the national character as a new Adam, with the result that the national psyche continued to oscillate between self-perceptions of unique innocence or unique evil." (55)

Hardly a comment on the struggles for equality waged by the nation that had "brought to all mankind for the first time the concept that man was born free."(56) Many contemporary observers as well as numerous historians have reflected on FDR's metaphors and symbols seized upon by Reagan as he anchored his program on that of Franklin Roosevelt, even as he undid the late President's political legacy, or disparaged it as "fascism". (57) Or on similarities of temperament and style. (58) As one would expect, his frequent references to Franklin D. Roosevelt, the political ideal he claimed to emulate, initially awoke among fellow Republicans a bewildered indignation. (59) Subsequent expressions of deference to Franklin Roosevelt came as the approaching centennial of the late President reanimated among conservatives the old rancor for Yalta's supposed betrayal. However, Reagan never lost his deep admiration for Roosevelt's conduct during the war. As late as November 1985, Reagan "cited ... reasons for our skepticism about the Soviets such as the Soviet betrayal of Stalin's promise at Yalta to hold free elections in the nations of Eastern Europe after World War II". (60) Purity was reclaimed by obliterating past blemishes. Reagan's vision of the American past was bent to fit his beliefs and fantasy: "He was forever reinventing history's past" (61). The inhabitant of an eclectic. past, one that privileged certain events and discarded others, Reagan was once stigmatized

for suffering from acute amnesia. (62) His, indeed, as Garry Wills has remarked, was more an appeal to go "Back to the Future", to mention the title of a movie that Reagan quoted in his 1982 State of the Union address. (63) In fact, historical references were blurred and actualized. The freedom fighters, the founding fathers were not, in his world, history. They became frame of reference for twentieth century America. An America whose principles were being tested throughout the world: In Nicaragua, in Poland, in Afghanistan, and at the end of his second term in the Soviet empire.

Replaying history was Reagan's attempt at exorcising it. The Cold War provided to a great extent the arena on which to stage the redeeming struggle against the blemishes of history, and that gave focus and opportunity to restore the nation's confidence. (64) Confrontation with the Soviet Union was a foremost priority in the administration's agenda, when it came to power, as political philosopher Raymond Aron suggested in the title of an article written for Foreign Affairs in 1981: it was indeed Ideology in Search of a Policy. (65)

This clear-cut vision of the world had hardly any shades. First of all, there seemed to be little room for peaceful coexistence between the two competing philosophies. (66) Washington would not exert its efforts on the side of the "evil empire" until Gorbachev's more promising days. No

inclination, therefore, to attempt a resolution of regional conflicts in cooperation with the Soviet Union. (67) On the contrary, such conflicts became battlegrounds of Soviet-American rivalry. At stake, it was believed, at least potentially, in every issue of contention, was this fundamental confrontation. The Soviet Union was considered to be largely responsible for Third World crises and tensions. (68) Little room was left, consequently, for national differences, idiosyncrasies which might escape this Manichean categorization, hardly a glance given at rivalries originating in regional nationalism. (69) Reagan's view of communism seems to have been monolithic. As remarked by Lou Cannon in his biography, Reagan used communism and socialism interchangeably and was actually surprised to discover French President Mitterand's hostility to the Soviet Union. (70) This monolithic conception of communism explains that initially his hostility was also focused against Beijing. In 1980 Reagan still was very critical of the normalization of relations with China, "a country whose ideology subscribes to an ideology based on a belief in destroying governments like ours. " (71) After heeding the advice of Nixon, Ford, Bush (U.S. representative in China after the 1972 normalization) and Haig, among others, Reagan adopted the strategy of preserving good relations with China as a deterrent against the Soviet Union, notwithstanding the fact that

he would ever completely shed his bipolar vision of the world. (72)

Because this notion of a bipolar world and of a relentless struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union so dominated Reagan's perspective, the internal dynamics of the Third World countries were largely overlooked by his diplomacy. Among the potentially most explosive regions was the Middle East, where "the facile 'Soviet instigation' argument upon which Reagan ... relied paled before the indigenous ferocity of ethnic, religious, regime, and social tensions ..." (73) In October 1981, when justifying his banking on Saudi Arabia to make the Arabs accept Israel's right to exist, Reagan asserted, for instance, that Saudi Arabia, an Islamic absolute monarchy, wanted "to be part of the West because they associate more with our views and our philosophy." (74) Before Shultz's appointment as Secretary of State in June 1982 and the drafting of a general peace plan in the Middle East, widely felt as a positive step, the attempt to create an anti-Soviet grouping in this area only compounded persisting tensions. The administration's sale of arms to the Saudis did not create the desired alliance between the Israelis and moderate Arab governments, but instead alarmed the Begin Government. (75)

Analyzing the case of the Iran-Iraq war, historian Fred Halliday remarks that "in the Gulf, the USSR and the United States had a

position that overlapped in many ways: both were concerned to limit and end the war; both, from 1982 onward, supported Iraq. While each blamed the other for the crisis in the Gulf, each knew that it was not primarily the other great power, but the local states, that had caused and continued this war. Yet the general, prevailing, crisis of East-West relations led to a situation in which the Reagan administration actively sought to rival the USSR by its policies in the Gulf. In so doing it both further exacerbated relations between Moscow and Washington, and missed opportunities for a coordinated East-West approach to the Gulf war itself. " (76)

Areas that were not of prominent strategic or economic importance, as was the case of most of the African continent, were to a large extent ignored. (77) Reagan's diplomatic initiatives hardly showed any understanding or sensitivity to African and Asian revolts against colonialism, religious uprisings, or Latin-American rebellions against dictatorships, manifesting his lack of any historical frame of reference. (78) Sadly ironical is this comment of Robert Pastor, former Director of Latin American Affairs on the National Security Council, on Mexico's relations with the United States: "Each new proposal from the United States suffers from historical amnesia. Each hesitant and suspicious response from Mexico suffers from historical paralysis. " (79) The social and political situation in

the Third World was considered secondary, while the threat of a subversive conspiracy ultimately emanating from Moscow dominated the administration's entire outlook. (80) Witness this odd remark: "Under Castro," Reagan wrote, "Cuba had become not only a satellite of Moscow but a potential jumping off spot for terrorists directed by his cohort and fellow Soviet client, Colonel Qaddafi. " (81)

He seemed to be aware on occasion that domestic conditions account for revolutions. He did manifest, for example, in his Memoirs some sensitivity for the Latin American apprehension of U.S. interference in their affairs, and some knowledge of the "economic, social, and political imbalances that made Latin America so ripe for revolution." In fact, he stated in his Memoirs, that "the threat of Communism wouldn't diminish until the people's standard of living was improved and the totalitarian countries of Latin America gave them more freedom." "We had to tread softly", he conceded. (82) The vision of a Soviet aggressive strive to dominate inspired the administration's agenda in many delicate areas. In addition, tolerance of autocratic regimes in many Third World countries, such as in Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Brazil and Chile, even though not fully consistent, was based on the intellectual crutch supplied by Kirkpatrick whose distinction between orderly, authoritarian,

regimes and totalitarian ones provided a neat rationale to support whoever was on the side of Washington against Moscow. (83)

Overlooked also because of this mesmerizing with the Soviet Union were sensitivities even of America's NATO allies, for instance, when Reagan tried to prevent European-Soviet commercial transactions in the gas pipeline project after the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981, or when the deployment of Pershing missiles was imposed on Germany. (84)

Trapped by its determination to pursue confrontational politics vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the resolve to erase the Vietnam trauma, the Reagan administration found itself in a dilemma. Public hostility against further U.S. interventions could only constrain its margin of maneuver, unless, of course, it acted covertly. Secrecy in the preparatory stage of the attack on Grenada was justified in Reagan's view to prevent rumors that this may become "another Vietnam." (85) But in general, any intervention had to be limited but successful and appear grandiose. The Reagan administration's diplomatic record is one strewn by symbolic assertions of strength, where the importance of rhetoric overrode the significance of actions. Even conservative observers saw a discrepancy between the Reagan administration's initiatives and the rationale given to

support them. Writing in 1985, for instance, at a time when there was yet little evidence of decisive change within the Soviet Union and when numerous tensions, among them the controversial Strategic Defense Initiative, strained East-West relations as well as NATO, diplomatic historian Robert E. Osgood asserted that "no administration has throughout its tenure shown a greater disparity between the popular impression of intentions it conveyed and the actual means it employed ... The continuity and moderation of the administration's operational policies and actions, from the outset, have been in marked contrast to its image of reckless militancy."

(86) Overlooking the tremendous cost involved in the arms race, Osgood voiced the preoccupation of conservatives: "Those who have focused their concern about Reagan's foreign policy on its alleged bellicosity and trigger-happiness have worried about the wrong thing. A more plausible worry ... is that tough talk has become a surrogate for expedient action; that President Reagan's popularity reflects the public inclination to savor the impression of national forcefulness without incurring any risks or costs to back it up; and that there will come a day of reckoning for which neither the government nor the public is prepared." (87) Outright opponents of the Reagan administration, not surprisingly, shared a similar view on what they considered the symbolical nature of the Reagan administration's initiatives.

Grenada's "uniquely easy" invasion in 1983, the showdown with Qaddafi in April 1986, interpreted by Chomsky as a "public relations" stunt, and more generally, the "Reagan doctrine" enounced in the February 1985 State of the Union Message, are concrete examples of this. Their function was mainly "theatrical" as Halliday writes of the Reagan doctrine. (88) These apparently bold initiatives, seemingly geared to the urgency of the moment, were in fact seeking to rescue the past and to clear the blemished memory of Vietnam. Inspiring them was "a motivated forgetting ... imply[ing] a cultural impulse both to have the experience and not to retain it in memory." (89) Since they hardly provided answers to actual situations, but instead attempts to restore the national identity, Reagan's diplomatic initiatives were linked together by a perpetual narcissistic self-redeeming logic. Speaker O'Neill illustrates this by the following remark: "Grenada was really about Lebanon ... · My greatest fear about Reagan's foreign policy is that ten years from now we'll look back on the Grenada incident as a dress rehearsal for our invasion of Nicaragua." (90)

The implications of the above are in many ways ironic. More often than not, Reagan would, as George Will once put it, "restore trust in that which he distrusts -- government, and accomplish exactly what he had condemned before: the dangerous growth of big government. (91) While he

did diminish the size of the administrative apparatus of government, he nevertheless allowed and contributed to making the government the problem by running massive deficits and multiplying the public debt: "As the rhetoric became more antigovernment, the policies became more controlling ... As his military expenditures mounted ever higher and the national debt passed the one-trillion-dollar mark, he announced that government was 'not the solution but the problem.'" (92) Adverse effects also ensued in the realm of foreign policy. The Reagan administration's obsession with the Soviet Union proved ultimately to be clearly counterproductive. It was the conciliatory stance and increasing popularity of Gorbachev after 1985 that assuaged the Western alliance. (93) While Reagan justified his 1983 SDI by claiming that the United States should negotiate from a position of strength, a catastrophic outcome was perhaps averted more thanks to internal developments in the Soviet Union than through the increase in Washington's war potential. Characterized by Sakharov as a "a kind of *ligne Maginot* in space - expensive and ineffective", the SDI that was conceived as a supreme strengthening of the United States deterrent capability could well have brought about gravely adverse consequences. (94) A myopic perspective of the world makes us believe that we have, largely helped by an aggressive foreign policy, "won" the cold war. Lesser mention is made of the internal

tensions that cracked open the colossal Soviet empire. While our Western democracies have certainly proven more flexible, more suited to the needs of the individual and hence, more durable than the former Soviet Union, it is important that we do not fall prey to the fallacy of this tempting belief, a belief in fact under girded by a very traditional faith in America's exceptionalism. How indeed does it stand when measured against the diversity of cultures that forever has overwhelmed ruling political systems?

Beyond the immediate and concrete results of the Reagan presidency is his symbolic legacy. Sociologist Jean Baudrillard has assessed the meaning of Reagan's presidency in the following way: "In Reagan, a system of values that was formerly effective turns into something ideal and imaginary. The image of America becomes imaginary for Americans themselves, at a point when it is without doubt profoundly compromised." (95) Besides obliterating the causes of the national crisis and lulling the country into a superficial sense of grandeur, Reagan persisted until the end of his presidency in portraying the government as an evil outsider. By successfully dissociating himself from what he saw as the undermining of the country's health by the Capital's political machine, Reagan contributed in no small measure to alienate the American people from its system. (96) Contrary to popular belief, therefore, Reagan did not really do away with the

malaise which he had always refused to see. Instead he changed the perception of this malaise. He helped to transform guilt into ills perpetrated by an outsider. Interestingly, the invisible, gradual encroachment of the state on a nation infantilized and unaware had been foreshadowed by Tocqueville.

(97)

1 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, New York, etc., Simon and Schuster, 1990, pp. 20-21. He attributed his exceptional destiny to the unfolding of God's plan as his mother did.

2 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 46, 84; EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency, An Actor's Finest Performance*, New York, Hippocrene Books, 1992, p. 56, notes Reagan's astounding luck to have found employment so fast at a time when one fourth of the nation's work force was unemployed.

3 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

4 DODER, Dusko, BRANDON, Louise, *Gorbachev, Heretic in the Kremlin*, New York, Viking Penguin, 1990, p. 319.

5 HOFFMANN, Stanley, "The Great Pretender. Reagan's America: Innocents at Home", in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 34, May 28, 1987, pp. 3 sq., commenting on Garry Wills' book on Reagan. MOYNIHAN, Daniel Patrick, *Came the Revolution, Argument in the Reagan Era*, San Diego, etc., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988, p. 157; BELLO, Walden, "From Dictatorship to Elite Populism: the United States and The Philippine Crisis", in MORLEY, Morris H., *Crisis and Confrontation, Ronald Reagan's Foreign Policy*, Totowa, New Jersey, Rowman and Littlefield, 1988, p. 214.

6 Cf. for example GREEN, David, *Vie Language of Politics in America, Shaping Political Consciousness from McKinley to Reagan*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 267.

7 On Reagan's pragmatist disposition, cf. CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan, The Role of a Lifetime*, New York, etc., Simon and Schuster, 1991, p. 307. On Reagan's tendency to invent stories and stick to them steadfastly whatever the opinion of his entourage, cf. *ibid.*, p. 58.

8 CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 298 about Reagan's inclinations on the U.S.-Soviet dialogue.

9 Interview of Lou Cannon with Nancy Reagan, May 5, 1989, quoted in CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan...*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

10 "There have been times in this office when I've wondered how you could do the job if you hadn't been an actor." were Reagan's exact words to ABC's David Brinkley, December 22, 1988, quoted in CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan...*, *op. cit.*, p. 51. The proliferation of special advisors on the White House staff and the media appeal of the Presidency further contribute to distance us from Ronald Reagan as a person. While he took liberties with the speeches that were drafted for him to deliver, he still followed the clues received from his advisers. Nevertheless, policy decisions, while also the general

product of the administration, reflect Reagan's opinions to the extent that he rationalized them and set them in the continuity of the American tradition.

11 Cannon notes in the same vein that "Reagan's perceptions about changes in the Soviet Union and his instincts about how to deal with them outpaced many of his advisers'." *ibid.*, p. 55, and notes that Reagan "in a conflict between feelings and facts, usually gave greater weight to his feelings." p. 38. On Reagan's proposal of open discussion in Ottawa, cf. *ibid.*, p. 466. In allowing the selling of arms to Iran, Reagan certainly seems to have been moved foremost by the fate of the hostages, not by the strategic overture to Iran's moderates which McFarlane favored. Reagan's public confession to the nation put forward mainly the human motivation in his decision to allow the trading of arms: REAGAN, RONALD, "Address on the Tower Commission Report", March 4, 1987, in BOYER, Paul, ed., *Reagan as President, Contemporary Views of the Man, His Politics, and His Policies*, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee Publisher, p. 223, confessing: " .. .I let my personal concern for the hostages spill over the geopolitical strategy of reaching out to Iran. I asked so many questions about the hostages' welfare that I didn't ask enough about the specifics of the total Iran plan ... " On Reagan's attitude vis-à-vis Marcos after his ousting, cf. EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...* , *op. cit.*, p. 309; on the cordiality of his relations with Marcos until February 1986, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 187-189. CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan...* , *op. cit.*, p. 364, explains that "Ferdinand Marcos had been a hero to Reagan since World War II, and he found it nearly impossible to adjust to the idea that Marcos had become a corrupt and discredited despot."

12 Quoted in HOFFMANN, Stanley, "The Great Pretender ... " , *op. cit.*, p. 3.

13 HEALE, M. J., *American Anticommunism, Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970*, Baltimore, etc., The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, explains well this "tendency to define 'American-ness' by identifying a polar opposite. American political culture seemed to require an enemy without as well as an enemy within, supplying the inverse image of the American character. In due course, the Soviet Union would perform this function, even more convincingly than aristocratic England", p. 12. WILLS, Garry, *Reagan's America, Innocents at Home*, New York, Doubleday and Co., 1987, p. 2, expresses in this way the role played by space in exorcizing the fear produced by aging in American society: "Beneath the spatial anxiety expressed in modern America, there is an even deeper *temporal* fear, that of aging. What if the New World should turn out no different from the Old? Progress may be our most important product, but youth is our oldest boast." (Italics his) On the rehabilitating role played by space in the American imagination, cf. GARCES, Laura, *La mondialisation de la doctrine Monroe à l'ère wilsonienne*, Lausanne, Payot, 1988, pp. 7-31.

14 REAGAN, Ronald, HUBLER, Richard G., *Where's the rest of me*, New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965, pp. 157 sq.

15 On this, cf. RITTER, Kurt, HENRY, David, in their excellent book *Ronald Reagan, The Great Communicator*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1992, pp. 14-16.

16 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

17 DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan, The Politics of Symbolism*, Cambridge, etc., Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 129-130. Cf. also pp. 131-132, where Dallek links Reagan's unwillingness to consider the Soviet Union as amenable to negotiation to his dissatisfaction with domestic affairs: "Reagan has been much less willing [than other foreign policy makers] to accept [the possibility that the Soviet Union is capable of give-

and-take in world affairs] ... because his depiction of the Soviet Union is less a balanced realistic view of its internal conditions and external aims than an amalgam of conservative complaints about conditions in the United States. When Reagan speaks of Soviet statism, of Communist indifference to personal freedom and the dignity of the individual, he is referring as much to conservative perceptions of recent trends in America as to the state of Russian affairs." The tendency to view American foreign policy as an extension of domestic tensions, has been commonly defended by revisionist historians.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

19 HESS, Stephen, BRODER, David S., *The Republican Establishment, 171e Present and Future of the GOP*, p. 275.

20 as noted by RITTER, Kurt, HENRY, David, *Ronald Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 18 21 Quoted in EDEL, Wilbur, *171e Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

22 EDEL, Wilbur, *171e Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

23 HESS, Stephen, BRODER, David S., *The Republican Establishment ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

24 DIONNE, EJ., Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1991, p. 228. HESS, Stephen, BRODER, David S., *The Republican Establishment ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 86-88.

25 BRODER, p. 191, speaks of Nixon's "policy of accommodation with the Communist powers that is indistinguishable from Roosevelt's.", in BRODER, David S., *The Party's Over. The Failure of Politics in America*, New York, etc., Harper and Row Publishers, 1971, p. 191. Debates over domestic and foreign issues in the sixties shattered the popular belief in an end of ideology, which had characterized the fifties. New interpretations emanating both from the right and from the 'New Left' went so far as to cause a deep questioning of the national identity as noted by Novick in reference to diplomacy: "the foreign policy debate which began in the sixties ... was not just about what we should do, but about who we were", NOVICK, Peter, *That Noble Dream. The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge, Mass., Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 445. The italics are his.

26 BRODER, David S., *Changing of the Guard, Power and Leadership in America*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1980, p. 13. AMBROSE, Stephen, *Nixon*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987-1991, 3 vols, makes a superbly detailed and nuanced analysis of Nixon in his three volume biography. Resentment against FDR's Hamiltonian nationalism, further expanded by Johnson, was an important element in conservative thinking. Cf. WHITE, John Kenneth, *The New Politics of Old Values*, Hanover, etc, University Press of New England, 1988, pp. 31-34, on the Hamilton-Jefferson dilemma which traditionally permeates the American imagination, and *ibid.*, pp. 45-47 on the expansion of Hamiltonian Nationalism up to Carter. White notes, *ibid.*, pp. 32-33, that "During the Civil War and the industrial era that followed, Republicans stood with Hamilton; Democrats claimed Jefferson as their own and promoted 'states' rights.' Since the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Democrats have consistently aligned themselves with Hamilton, referring to view the nation as a family."

27 A concise exposition of the formation of the New Right is given by BRODER, David S., *Changing of the Guard...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-188. More generally, DIONNE, E J., Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-227, explains how these contradictory

tendencies asserted themselves before and during Carter's presidency, and shows how Carter was incapable of reaching a compromise acceptable to all sides. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 228-230, on the conservatives' search for allies in other directions, chiefly among George Wallace's followers. On the crisis in the Democratic party manifested by the critical voices of Wallace and Robert Kennedy, cr. White, John Kenneth, *The New Politics of Old Values*, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Rising abstention from voting after Nixon also indicated a widespread crisis in American values: BRODER, David S., *The Party's Over ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-201. Cf. also BRODER, David S., *Changing of the Guard ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 sq., on the role played by the change of generations in this crisis. The electorate that came of age in the sixties and the seventies did not have the proud vision of the nation's role in World War II, but rather a memory marred by the domestic tensions of the sixties and by American intervention in Vietnam. Also of interest as regards the conservatives, was the change in their social extraction, and their belief that conservatism had to develop a blue-collar constituency, a belief which generally reflected their own background: cf. *ibid.*, p. 174.

28 BRODER, David S., *The Party's Over. ..*, *op. cit.*, p. xvi. In the same sense, cf. *ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix. Broder attributes part of the frustration to the fact that the issues that had acted as catalyst for the formation of the New Deal Coalition, namely the welfare state and the government's responsibility for the health of the economy no longer divides the parties: cf. *ibid.*, p. 191. This pessimism contrasts with the brighter outlook manifested in his earlier work written in collaboration with HESS, Stephen, BRODER, David S., *The Republican Establishment ...*, *op. cit.*

29 On this point, cf. the excellent book of NOVICK, Peter, *That Noble Dream, The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, pp. 455-56. Also, DRAPER, Theodore, "Neoconservative History", *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 32, 16 January 1986, pp. 5-15.

30 Quoted in EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 25. This theme of the 'people' vs. the 'interests' is a cyclical one in American political life. Underlying it, is a pervasive feeling of insecurity and a fear of conspiracy explored by Hofstadter's celebrated study: HOFSTADER, Richard, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, New York, Knopf, 1965. More recently, cf. DALLEK, Robert, *The American Style of Foreign Policy, Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs*, New York, Knopf, 1983. This collective fear has been associated to the misgivings associated to time. On this, cf. *supra*, n. 13.

31 Quoted in WILLS, Garry, *Reagan's America ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 299. Reagan made this reference to Paine in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983, in REAGAN, Ronald, *Speaking my Mind, Selected Speeches*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 180. GREEN, David, *The Language of Politics in America...*, *op. cit.*, p. 257, notes that Reagan was less a conservative than an anticommunist which explains his revolutionary drive. While his ideas were somewhat frowned upon by some of the moderate conservatives, they also drew towards him the religious right wing of the Republican Party.

32 REAGAN, Ronald, "Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference," Washington, D.C., March 1, 1985, in REAGAN, Ronald, *Speaking my Mind, Selected Speeches*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 272.

33 On this, cf. EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

- 34 CANNON, Lou, *Reagan*, New York, Putnam, 1982, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
- 35 WILL, George E, *The Morning After, American Successes and Excesses*, 1981-1986, New York, etc., The Free Press, 1986, p. xv.
- 36 O'NEILL, Tip, *Man of the House. The Life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O'Neill*, New York, Random House, 1987, pp. 347-348.
- 37 BRODER, David S., *Changing of the Guard...*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
- 38 Quoted in CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan...*, *op. cit.*, p. 830.
- 39 Cf. HELLMANN, John, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 206. HERRING, George C., *America's Longest War, The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1986 (1st ed. 1979), pp. 275-278, gives a good explanation of the new nationalism which gradually asserted itself in the ten years after Vietnam. Note that Reagan was conscious nevertheless of the "post-Vietnam syndrome" to which he partly attributed the reluctance to intervene in Central America: cf. REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 479, 451, 266.
- 40 WILLS, Garry, *Reagan's America ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 385.
- 41 CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76. Cannon notes that Reagan only acknowledged that Nixon had deceived the country in August 1974, when the latter was preparing his resignation speech. EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27, explains that Reagan tended to lessen the importance of Watergate because of the East-West conflict which, in his view, weighed far more and commended Nixon for having brought about an "easing of tensions worldwide such as we haven't known since World War II." (*ibid.*, p. 26).
- 42 WILLS, Garry, *Reagan's America ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 357. Cf. also p. 360.
- 43 On the Teflon effect, cf. CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218.
- 44 CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan. ..*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-64. Cf. the exasperation expressed by WILL, George E, "The Cold War as a Misunderstanding", Oct. 10, 1985, in WILL, George E, *The Morning After. ..*, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-351; WILL, George E, "America's Therapeutic Impulses," November 21, 1985, *ibid.*, pp. 353-355. Some of Reagan's collaborators, such as Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, would manifest their adamant opposition to negotiations with the Soviets in 1985, which journalist Nonnan Podhoretz saw as comparable to appeasement in the 1920's and 1930's. On conservative opposition to U.S./Soviet negotiations, cf. EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 201, 207.
- 45 A good analysis of this is given by EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 sq.
- 46 A comprehensive analysis of this speech the content of which was Reagan's and which was apparently given on his own initiative can be found in ZIMMERMANN, Karsten, "The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)," in HAFTENDORN, Helga, SCHISLER, Jakob, eds., *The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of American Strength?*, Berlin etc., Walter de Gruyter, 1988, pp. 154-157. Zimmermann also develops the concerns about a possible negative impact on NATO as well as the Soviet Union that were expressed by Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense, as well as George Shultz.
- 47 Reagan expresses this as early as 1964 in his speech for Goldwater: REAGAN, Ronald, "Televised Nationwide Address on Behalf of Barry Goldwater," October 27,

1964, in REAGAN, Ronald, " *Speaking my Mind, Selected Speeches*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 35; RITTER, Kurt, HENRY, David, *Ronald Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

48 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 133. Italics his. He expressed himself in the same sense when asked on May 2, 1967 about whether Vietnam would become a 1968 issue: "I have insisted for a long time that our goal should be to win as swiftly as possible, that attrition over the long period of time will cost us more in lives than a sudden strike for victory." Quoted in HESS, Stephen, BRODER, David S., *The Republican Establishment...*, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

49 He saw 'Truman's refusal to back MacArthur to the fullest as the "only thing that kept Harry Truman from real greatness.": REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 133. Reagan believed that "if we as a nation send our soldiers abroad to get shot at, we have a moral responsibility to do *everything* we can to win the war we put them in." : *ibid.* (Italics his.) For Reagan, Vietnam followed from the stalemate in Korea (*ibid.*)

50 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 265. P. 266, he adds, that "during the late seventies, I felt our country had begun to abdicate this historical role as the spiritual leader of the Free World and its foremost defender of democracy. Some of our resolve had gone, along with a part of our commitment to uphold the values we cherished."

51 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 267. Reagan quoted Goldwater's phrase "peace through strength" in his October 1964 speech on behalf of the Senator: REAGAN, Ronald, "Televised Nationwide Address in Behalf of Barry Goldwater," in REAGAN, Ronald, *Speaking my Mind, Selected Speeches*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 36.

52 Cf. REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 266. Cf. also p. 451, where he writes, that "the United States couldn't remain spooked forever by this experience to the point where it refused to stand up and defend its legitimate national security interests.

53 Cf. REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 299. Another expression of his awareness of the Vietnam trauma can be found in *ibid.*, p. 266. Cf. HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", in MORLEY, Morris H., ed., *Crisis and Confrontation ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 132, remarks that this represented one of the main assumptions that guided his policy. On Reagan's Central American diplomacy as motivated by a wish to exorcize Vietnam, cf. HERRING, George C. *Americas Longest War, The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, *op. cit.*, p. 278, and on the Reagan administration's approach to the Middle East as conditioned by this experience, cf. HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East," *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153, 155. Halliday notes that the prevailing anti-interventionist mood led the Reagan administration to find "low-cost forms of intervention that would give substance" to the claim that the United States was asserting itself but without taking actions that would lead to body bags and domestic revulsion within the United States itself. Herein lay the rationale for counterterrorism policy: it had a high political profile and was orchestrated to respond to the demands for action in the Third World, but it held low risks for the U.S. armed forces and for the presidency." He also notes, moreover, that Robert McFarlane's ordering of U.S. attacks in Lebanon against the Druze was also motivated by this resolve to go beyond the Vietnam experience: *ibid.*, p. 145. LaFEBER, Walter, "The Two-or Three-Phases of U.S.-Soviet Relations", in MORLEY, Morris H., ed., *Crisis and*

Confrontation ..., *op. cit.*, pp. 32-35, discusses the difference of views between Shultz and Weinberger on U.S. intervention in the Third World, the former advocating large use of American power in this region, while the Defense Secretary clearly stated in a speech of November 28, 1984 that any U.S. military effort should be undertaken only if "vital to the U.S. national interests". Other preconditions for intervention laid by him were "that it be carried through until the campaign was waged with the clear intention of 'winning'; that objectives on the political as well as military level be well defined and understood; that in the case of extended conflict, a continual reassessment take place to ensure that the national interest continued to require such an effort; that arms be used only as a last resort; and-most notable-that the military receive 'reasonable assurance of support from Congress and the public before making the commitment." (*ibid.*, pp. 34-35) LaFeber notes that Weinberger had been opposed to the sending of Marines in Lebanon in 1982, and had questioned the invasion of Grenada.

54 Quoted in EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

55 HELLMANN, John, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 216, summarizing Vann Woodward's argument. Cf. also Vann WOODWARD, C., "The Fall of the American Adam", *The New Republic*, Dec. 2 1981, pp. 13-16.

56 EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 66, Quotes in addition Reagan's lack of contact with the intellectual sources of the American revolution.

57 LEUCHTENBURG, William E., *In the Shadow of FDR, From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1989 (1st ed. 1983), pp. 219-220.

58 CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109, 179, 239, 830.

59 LEUCHTENBURG, William E., *In the Shadow of FDR. . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 209. As so thoroughly described by this author, his was of course a totally re-fabricated Roosevelt: cf. *ibid.*, pp. 217-218, 223-224. 60 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 635-636. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 305, where Reagan remembers telling Breznev in December 1981, after imposition of martial law in Poland, that "at Yalta ... Stalin had promised Poland and all the countries of Eastern Europe the right of self determination, but the Soviets had never granted it to any of them." On Reagan's admiration of FDR's conduct during the war, cf. LEUCHTENBURG, William E., *In the Shadow of FDR ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215. On the denouncing of Roosevelt by *Source*, the publication of the Republican National Committee in the fall of 1981, cf. *ibid.*, p.233

61 LEUCHTENBURG, William E., *In the Shadow of FDR...*, *op. cit.*, p. 211. Part of his distortions of the past probably stemmed from his lack of historical awareness, which came out" for instance when he mixed up President Grover Cleveland with Grover Cleveland Alexander, the ball player in a conversation with Tip O'Neill: O'NEILL, Tip, *Man of the House...*, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

62 Attributed to diplomat and writer Carlos Fuentes, quoted in KAMMEN, Michael, *Mystic Chords of Memory, The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, p. 662. EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 23, notes that Reagan's Autobiography, *Where's the Rest of Me*, first published in 1965, didn't contain any discussion of the politics of the fifties and sixties, except a reference to the Soviet Union's "plan to conquer the world." Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 65 sq. his discussion of Reagan's conception of history.

63 Cf. WILLS, Garry, *Reagan's America...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 371, 200.

64 HUNT, Michael, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987, p. 188-189. Hunt explains the consolidating nature of foreign policy in American nationalism in *ibid.*, pp. 189 sq. 65 ARON, Raymond, "Ideology in Search of a Policy," *Foreign Affairs, America and the World*, 1981, no. 3, pp. 503-524.

66 RITTER, Kurt, HENRY, David, *Ronald Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

67 The Middle East is a good example in this respect, as ably developed by HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", *op. cit.*, pp. 131-157, esp. 140-141.

68 Cf. HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", *op. cit.*, p. 132, more specifically on the Arab-Israeli dispute, p. 146, and on the Iran-Iraq war, p. 140.

69 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 407, speaks of "the savagery that forever lies beneath the sands of the Middle East," and p. 453 of the Shiite fundamentalists as motivated by the promise of "instant entry to Paradise for killing an enemy of Iran's theocracy" made to them by their leaders. In the same sense, p. 462, he writes that the young soldiers of the Iran-Iraq war who were sent ... "to their deaths ... did so joyously because they believed 'Tonight, we will be in Paradise.'"

70 CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 466.

71 quoted in DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

72 Not that this approach seems to have modified his strictly bipolar view of the world. Reagan's subsequent difficulty to judge China - a communist but not an expansionist nation - and one surely headed according to him on the road to capitalism also indicates an incapacity or a reluctance to diverge from these categories, cf. CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 482, p. 479; DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan*, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175. The promising turn in relations with the PRC was to be overshadowed by the selling of weapons to Taiwan, an initiative which between 1982 and 1983 increasingly alienated China, while Reagan reserved the right to compromise pending the conclusion of agreements between Beijing and Taiwan. As a result, the PRC was to distance itself increasingly from the United States as well as the Soviet Union and "strengthen its identity as a developing country." On this, cf. DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan*, *op. cit.*, p. 191. More generally, cf. DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan*, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175, 190-191 for a succinct overview of Reagan's dealings with China.

73 HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", *op. cit.*, p. 155. In the same vein, Khoury writes that "obsession with the Soviet Union as the 'evil empire' somewhat distorted [the Reagan administration's] view of Soviet objectives in the Middle East.": KHOURY, Philip S., "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", in KYVIG, David E., *Reagan and the World*, New York, etc., Greenwood Press, 1990, pp. 73-74. These were primarily issues of security and strategy, not an interest for oil markets, which explains Soviet chief interest in the countries, which shared long borders with it, Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey.

74 Quoted in EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ...*, *op. cit.*, p.184.

75 DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan*, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-174. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 187-190, for a summary of the September 1982.

76 Cf. HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", *op. cit.*, p. 141.

77 On this, cf. ROTBERG, Robert I., "The Reagan Era in Africa", in KYVIG, David E.,

Reagan and the World, op. cit., pp. 119-137. The big exception in this respect was of course South Africa and Namibia/Angola.

78 Quoted by DALLEK, Robert, *Ronald Reagan, op. cit.*, p. 174. Cf. also EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ... , op. cit.*, p. 169.

79 PASTOR, Robert A, CASTANEDA, Jorge G., *Limits to Friendship, Ille United States and Mexico*, New York, Vintage Books, 1989, p. 52. Going to the "center of the matter", Pastor furthermore notes that "the United States is a nation that does not feel it needs to remember its past, and the Mexican government feels it cannot afford to forget it.", *ibid.*

80 Cf. the perceptive analysis of the State Department's September 1985 publication, "Revolution Beyond Our Borders: Sandinista Intervention in Central America," by MORLEY, Morris H. and PETRAS James E, "The Reagan Administration and Nicaragua: How Washington Constructs its Case for Counterrevolution in Central America," in MORLEY, Morris H., ed., *Crisis and Confrontation ... , op. cit.*, pp. 158 sq.

81 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life, op. cit.*, 1990, pp. 473-474. Elsewhere, he calls him a "mad clown": *ibid.*, p. 511, a "crackpot", *ibid.*, p. 518, or a "madman ... trying to unify the world of Islam under rigid religious control - a theocracy, like Iran ... He was seeking to accomplish his goal using Libya's oil wealth, Russian weapons, and terrorism.", *ibid.*, pp. 280-281. On Libya as the Soviet Union's surrogate in the Middle East, and on Qaddafi's ties to Moscow: cf. *ibid.*, pp.290, 444. In effect, the latter's disruptive actions had proven ultimately far more destructive to the Arab cause than to the West, his support had been often directed to counter-revolutionary forces, and his hostility directed to the Soviet Union as well. This is succinctly exposed by HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154. Examples of Qaddafi's support to counter "revolutionary forces are the crushing of the left in Sudan and support to the north Yemeni invasion of South Yemen (*ibid.*)

82 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life, op. cit.*, p. 239. He doesn't, however, mention any "big stick". It is difficult to assess the significance of Reagan's acknowledging the importance of socio-economic factors in the under-development of Latin America, given his apparent agreement with Kirkpatrick's recommendations of support to authoritarian governments. EDEL, Wilbur, *The Reagan Presidency ... , op. cit.*, p. 168, quotes a February 1967 speech in which Reagan expressed two reasons for underdevelopment of nations, neither of which concedes the slightest importance to socio-economic or cultural factors: "First, because of their political systems. Either they are too unstable ... or else these systems are in the grip of modem-day feudalism, as in Russia and China. Second, because they lack both the know-how and the political structure necessary to build business, industry and commerce."

83 On Kirkpatrick's 1979 *Commentary* article which distinguished between authoritarian and totalitarian governments as having impressed Reagan, cf. GERSON, Allan, *The Kirkpatrick Mission, Diplomacy Without Apology, America at the United Nations*, New York, etc., The Free Press, 1991, pp. iv-xv.

84 This was one question on which the Europeans agreed. On relations between the Reagan administration and Western Europe cr. LUNDESTAD, Geir, "The United States and Western Europe under Ronald Reagan," in KYVIG, David E., *Reagan and the World, op. cit.*, pp. 39-62.

85 REAGAN, Ronald, *An American Life, op. cit.*, 1990, p. 451.

86 OSGOOD, Robert E., "Reagan's Foreign Policy in a Postwar Perspective," in GOLDSTEIN, Walter, ed., *Reagan's Leadership and the Atlantic Alliance, Views from Europe and America*, Washington, etc., Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1986, pp. 29-30. Among the initiatives cited to justify this moot assertion are "the immediate renunciation of the punitive grain embargo against the USSR; early resumption of arms negotiations ... ; explicit de-linkage of arms negotiations from Soviet behavior in the Third World; ... continued commitment to the 'peace process' in the Middle East ... , etc.," *ibid.*, p. 30. Even Osgood, however, saw an exception to "the disparity between tough pronouncements and moderate action ... in Central America," while asserting that American involvement in this area would not have been any less under preceding administrations, *ibid.*, p. 31. It is interesting to note that in 1981, already, Osgood expressed reasonable optimism on the assumption, *inter alia*, that "the administration [would] avoid the hazards of talking toughly with a weak stick it does not even wield.", OSGOOD, Robert E., "The Revitalization of Containment," *Foreign Affairs, America and the World*, 1981, no. 3, pp. 495-496.

87 OSGOOD, Robert E., "Reagan's Foreign Policy in a Postwar Perspective," in GOLDSTEIN, Walter, ed., *Reagan's Leadership and the Atlantic Alliance, Views from Europe and America*, Washington, etc., Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1986, p. 32.

88 LaFEBER, Walter, "The Two-or Three?-Phases of U.s.-Soviet Relations", ~ MORLEY, Morris H., ed., *Crisis and Confrontation ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41; CHOMSKY, Noam, "The First Prime Time Bombing in History (Late April 1986)", in CHOMSKY, Noam, *Language and Politics*, Montreal, Quebec, etc., Black Rose Books, 1988, p. 489; HALLIDAY, Fred, "The Reagan Administration and the Middle East", *op. cit.*, p. 154, p. 153, Halliday writes of the Libyan expedition that it expressed the "need to engage in a low-risk theatrical demonstration of U.S. power to meet domestic pressure for the United States to do 'something'." 89 ROGIN, Michael, "Make my Day!", *Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics*, *Representations*, Vol. 29, 1990, p. 105. Cf. also p. 118: "The Reagan regime put America back together by exploiting and disavowing the 1960s."

90 O'NEILL, Tip, *Man of the House ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 367. These initiatives were fatally linked, since they rested on the same premise of Soviet instigation. On this, cf. REAGAN, Ronald, "Address to the Nation on Events in Lebanon and Grenada," October 27, 1983, in REAGAN, Ronald, *Speaking my Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

91 WILL, George F., *The Morning After*, *op. cit.*, p. 238. As Lou Cannon remarks, long after Reagan became President, he still spoke of government as they, and never identified himself with it, CANNON, Lou, *President Reagan ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

92 GREEN, David, *The Language of Politics in America ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268. Cf. also MOYNIHAN, Daniel Patrick, *Came the Revolution...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157: "Big government became a bargain. For seventy-five cents worth of taxes, you got one dollar's worth of return. Washington came to resemble a giant discount house. If no tax would balance the budget, and no outlay would make it any worse, why try?"

93 An early and mildly amusing exasperated view of 'decadent' Europe is given by Rothschild, Robert, "The Second Enemy of the Alliance: Nationalist Ideology," in GOLDSTEIN, Walter, ed., *Reagan's Leadership and the Atlantic Alliance, Views from Europe and America*, Washington, etc., Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1986, pp. 34-39. HILLENBRAND, Martin J., "American Foreign Policy

and the Atlantic Alliance", in *ibid.*, pp. 40-63, gives a wider and more balanced perspective. LUNDESTAD, Geir, "The United States and Western Europe under Ronald Reagan," in KYVIG, David E., *Reagan and the World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50, writes about the general lack of European support for the Reagan doctrine (with the exception of Britain as regarded Afghanistan). On the subject of the rapprochement between the United States and the Soviet Union, Lundestad notes, *ibid.*, p. 52, that the Europeans feared that "the super-power duo would operate at the expense of European interests."

94 Quoted in DODER, Dusko, BRANSON, Louise, *Gorbachev...*, *op. cit.*, p. 208. Cf. also CHOMSKY, Noam, *Language and Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 358, expressing himself in February 1983; MOYNIHAN, Daniel Patrick, *Came the Revolution ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-148.

95 BAUDRILLARD, Jean, *America*, London, etc., Verso, 1988, p. 114.

96 WILL, George F., *The Morning After....*, *op. cit.*, p. 357, comments that at least until the Iran arms scandal "the public just didn't connect this man with his own government."

97 TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis de, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, Tome I, pp. 324325.