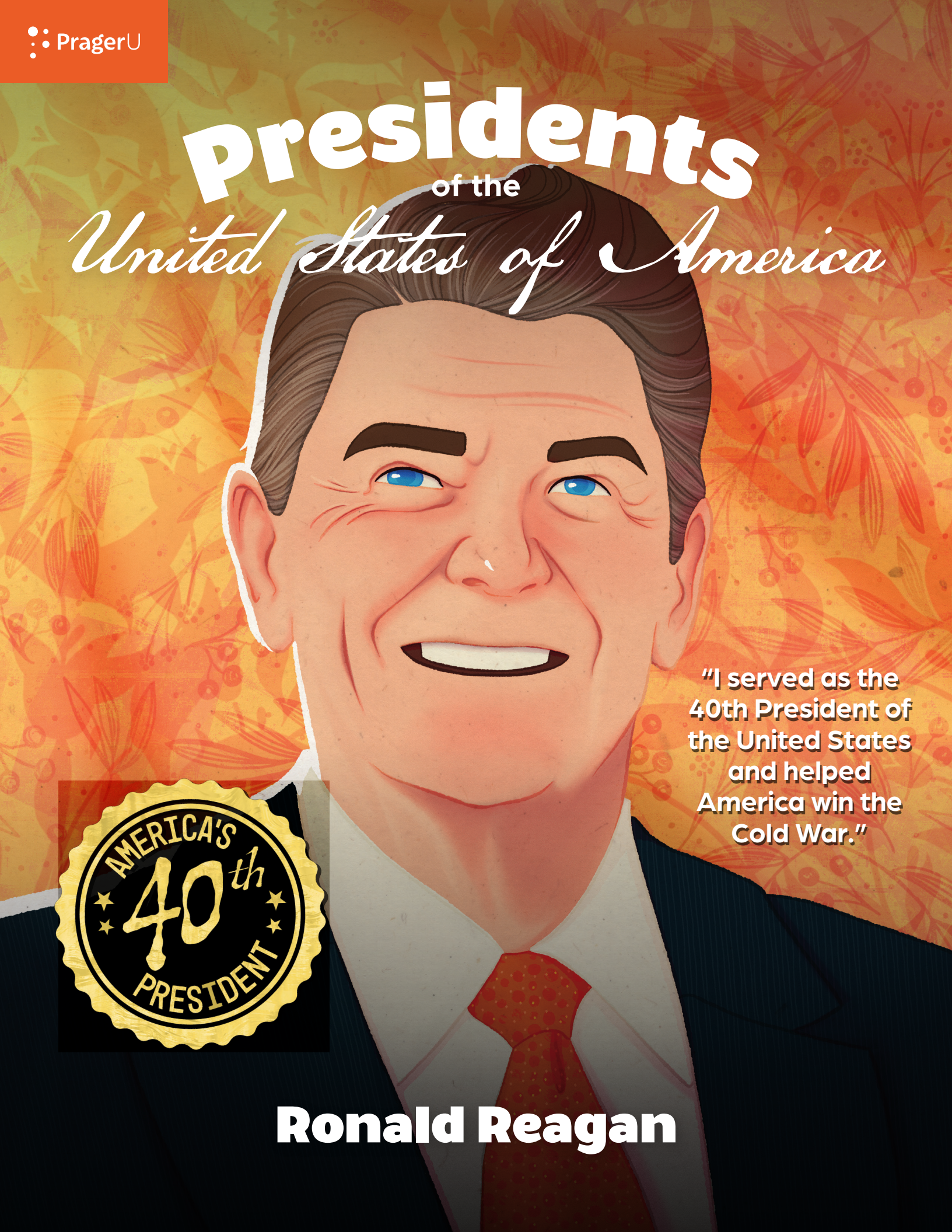
PragerU

Presidents of the United States of America



Ronald Reagan



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Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about Ronald Reagan's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

The Secret Service had a codename for President Reagan. We need your help to find out what it was. Your task is to help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them, and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _

Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

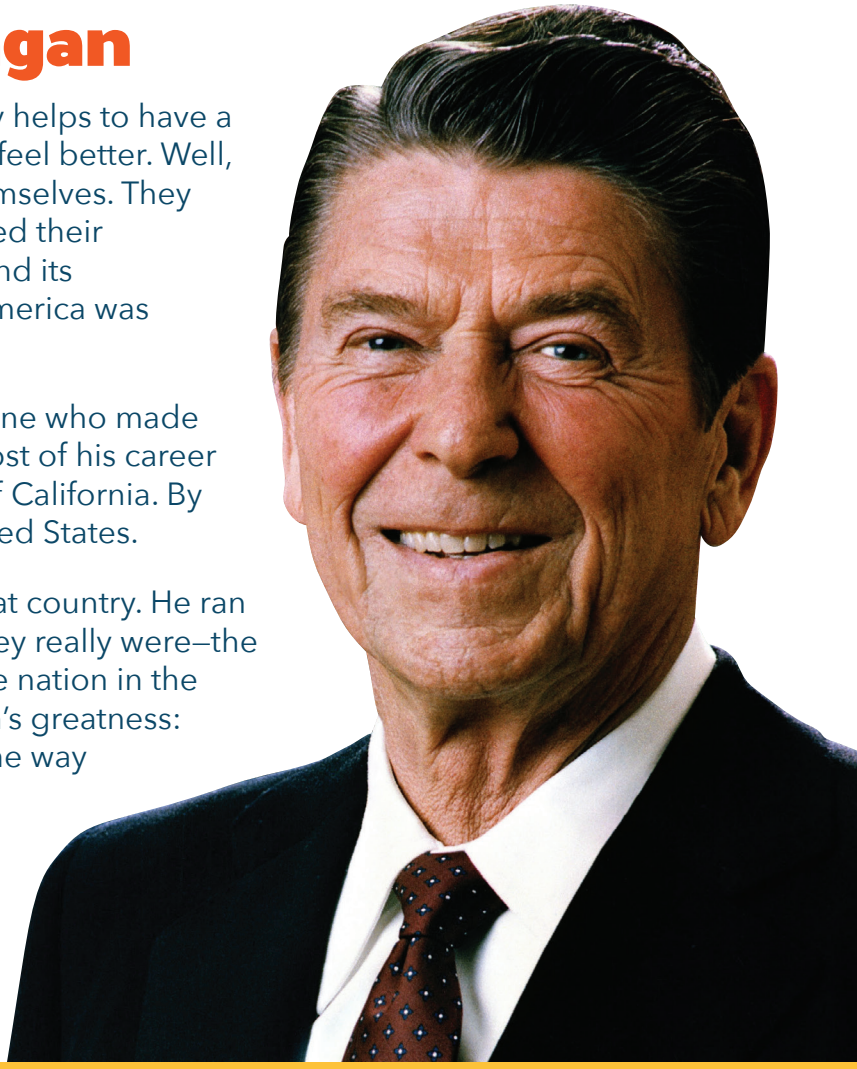
Meet Ronald Reagan

Have you ever felt down on yourself? It usually helps to have a friend who can encourage you and make you feel better. Well, in 1980, Americans were feeling down on themselves. They were struggling to make enough money to feed their families, and they saw their nation falling behind its competitors. They began to doubt whether America was really that great of a country.

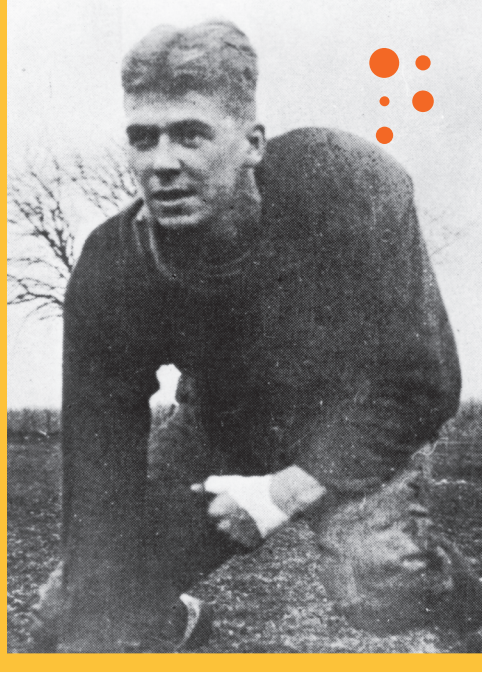
Fortunately, that same year, they found someone who made them feel better: Ronald Reagan. He spent most of his career as an actor and had served as the Governor of California. By 1980, he was running for President of the United States.

Reagan had no doubt that America was a great country. He ran for president, reminding Americans of who they really were—the citizens of the greatest, freest, most productive nation in the world. He also had a plan to restore the nation's greatness: give people more freedom to live their lives the way they wanted.

It didn't take long for Americans to feel confident in themselves again—thanks, in large part, to their 40th President, Ronald Reagan.



Young Ronald



Ronald Wilson Reagan was born on February 6, 1911, in Tampico, Illinois. His father, Jack, was a salesman, and his mother, Nelle, was a seamstress. He also had an older brother named Neil. Nelle was a devout Christian who dedicated her life to serving others, especially the sick and needy. She was a major influence on young Ronald, and he admired her for the rest of his life.

The Reagans were a poor family and moved around Illinois wherever his father could find work. Ronald was a handsome boy and an excellent swimmer. He worked as a lifeguard at Lowell Park in Dixon, Illinois. Newspapers reported that he even saved 77 people from drowning.

Young Ronald attended Dixon High School, where he was popular on campus. He was president of his class, performed in school plays, and played on the football and basketball teams.

After graduating in 1928, he attended Eureka College, where he majored in economics. His grades were average, but, just as in high school, he was active on campus. He played football, swam, was a member of the drama and debate clubs, and was president of the student council.



Interesting Facts

- He was known as the "Great Communicator."
- He was a member of the Republican Party.
- He was a lifeguard in his youth and saved 77 people from drowning.
- Prior to entering politics, he was an actor in Hollywood.
- He was the first president to be the head of a union (the Screen Actors Guild).
- He was the first president to appoint a woman to serve on the Supreme Court (Sandra Day O'Connor).
- He survived an assassination attempt in 1981.
- He was the first president to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Early Career

Reagan graduated in 1932 in the middle of the Great Depression. That same year, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States. Reagan and his family were staunch Democrats and strong supporters of President Roosevelt.

Reagan moved to Iowa, where he took a job as a radio sportscaster. He eventually did the play-by-play for Chicago Cubs games. He wasn't able to attend the games in person, so he had to be very creative and imagine many of the details for the audience.

In 1937, he traveled with the Cubs for their training camp in Southern California. While he was there, an unexpected opportunity opened up: a major **Hollywood** studio, Warner Brothers, gave him a chance to audition for a movie.



Reagan with his parents





Hollywood

At six-foot-one, Ronald Reagan was a tall, handsome man with a friendly personality. These qualities made him an ideal Hollywood star, so Warner Brothers hired him. From 1937 to 1957, he appeared in over 50 movies. These years are now known as the Golden Age of Hollywood. It was the era of legendary actors and actresses, such as Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart, Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn, and Judy Garland—to name just a few.

Reagan was one of Warner's most popular actors and was a major box office draw. He earned praise for his roles in the movies *Knute Rockne—All American* and *Kings Row*.

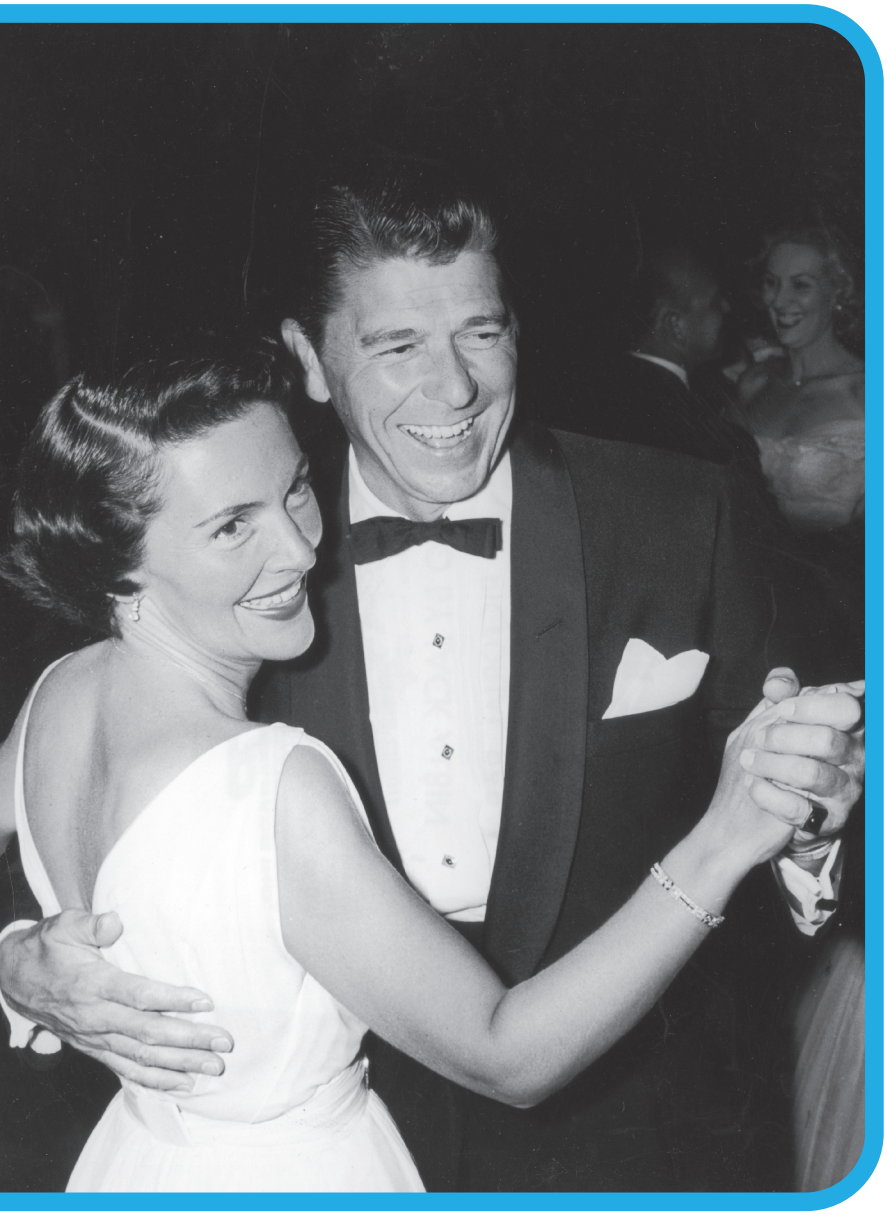
In 1938, he starred in the movie *Brother Rat* with a beautiful actress named Jane Wyman. They fell in love and got married in 1940. They eventually had a daughter, Maureen, and adopted a son, Michael.

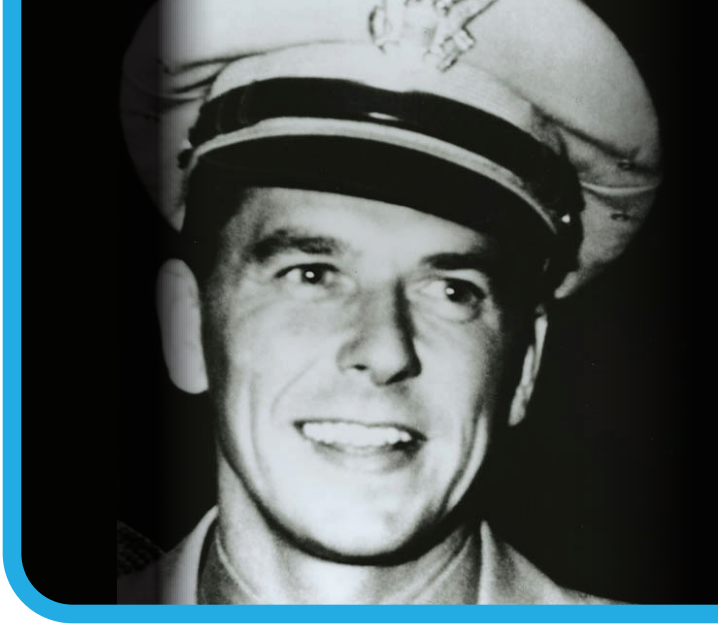
During World War II, Reagan served as a second lieutenant in the Army Air Corps' First Motion Picture Unit. His poor eyesight kept him from combat, but he served the country by narrating training films and starring in patriotic movies.

Sadly, Reagan's marriage with Jane began to fall apart. They were both too busy with their careers and had very different interests. They got divorced in 1948.

Union President

Reagan was a busy man and did more than acting. He also got involved in more serious matters. Since 1937, Reagan had been a member of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), which was a **labor union** that represented Hollywood performers. He was an active member, and his peers even elected him president—an office he held from 1947 to 1954. During this time, he fought for better pay and benefits for his fellow actors and actresses. More importantly, his time as SAG president taught him the art of negotiating—a skill he would later use as a political figure and statesman.





Anti-Communist

During his time as SAG president, Reagan also learned more about an evil movement that threatened the country: **communism**. At the time, the United States was in an epic struggle, called the **Cold War**, against the most powerful communist country in the world, the **Soviet Union**. The Soviet Union was a **totalitarian dictatorship**. Its leaders were working hard to spread communism around the world—and wherever it spread, freedom disappeared, and people were imprisoned and killed.

In the United States and in Hollywood, there were many communists who hoped they could impose their views on America and transform it from a free country to a dictatorship like the Soviet Union.

Reagan fought hard against communism in Hollywood. He didn't, however, want to be part of a witch hunt in which innocent people would be accused of being communists. When an actress named Nancy Davis was falsely identified as a communist, she went to Reagan for help. He was happy to help Nancy, and their relationship continued to develop. The two were a perfect match and quickly fell in love. They got married in 1952 and had two children—Patty and Ron.

Switching Teams

During the 1950s, Reagan was getting older and having a harder time getting acting gigs. At the same time, television was becoming more and more popular. The General Electric (GE) Company had a television series, *General Electric Theater*, and decided to hire Reagan as the show's host. Millions of viewers got to see Reagan regularly on TV.

As host, Reagan traveled around the country, giving speeches at GE plants and meeting the company's employees. The more people he met, the more he realized that the government in America was getting too powerful. Thanks to Roosevelt's New Deal policies, the government was spending more money, creating more rules for people to follow, and taking more and more of the people's money through high taxes. At the same time, Reagan was becoming more **conservative**. Although he previously favored Roosevelt's big government policies, he now believed this threatened the freedom of the American people.

Reagan had been a Democrat for his entire life, but he realized he agreed more with the Republican Party, which opposed communism and big government. Reagan also supported Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower during this time. In 1962, Reagan made the jump and registered, for the first time, as a Republican.

A Life-Changing Speech

In 1964, the Republican Party chose as its presidential candidate Senator Barry Goldwater to face Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson. Reagan was very excited since he agreed with Goldwater's conservative beliefs. On October 27, 1964, Reagan gave a speech, later known as the "**Time for Choosing**" speech, where he explained why he supported Goldwater. Reagan said, "I have spent most of my life as a Democrat. I recently have seen fit to follow another course." He attacked President Johnson's "**Great Society**" programs, which made the government even bigger than it was under Roosevelt. Reagan also made clear his opposition to communism.

The speech impressed everyone who saw it. Reagan spoke with confidence and in ways that inspired his listeners. His speeches would eventually inspire millions of people around the world, earning him the nickname the "Great Communicator." Even though Goldwater lost in a landslide that year, conservatives across America believed they had found a new leader: Ronald Reagan.



Quote

"Freedom is a fragile thing, and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation."
- January 1967

Governor

Reagan never intended to enter politics—most actors didn't at the time—but now he was being discussed as a candidate for political office. In 1966, the Republicans in California chose him as their candidate for governor. Reagan won in a landslide.

As governor, Reagan faced much unrest on college campuses, such as the University of California, Berkeley, where students committed violent acts in protest against the Vietnam War. Reagan sent the National Guard to Berkeley to restore order.

Reagan was a popular governor and was re-elected in 1970. During his second term, he implemented many conservative policies, such as reforming the state's **welfare** system, which made people less dependent on the government and more self-reliant. His policies made California a better place, and he left office after two terms in 1975.

Running for President

In 1976, Gerald Ford was serving as president and was planning on running to stay in office. Reagan decided to challenge him for the Republican nomination. This was a risky thing to do since it was very unusual for anyone to challenge a sitting president for the nomination of his own party. Reagan came very close to defeating Ford for the Republican nomination but ultimately lost.

That fall, Democrat candidate Jimmy Carter defeated Ford for the presidency. Under President Carter, the nation suffered from a poor economy. At the same time, the Soviet Union, under its leader Leonid Brezhnev, had strengthened its military and was as aggressive as ever. It invaded Afghanistan and spread communism there and also into Latin America.

Reagan was very concerned that the communists might win the Cold War, so he ran for president in 1980. He easily won the nomination and selected a very experienced leader, George H.W. Bush, as his running mate.

The American people were dissatisfied with Carter's leadership. They, like Reagan, were concerned about the Soviet Union. They were also suffering through an economic crisis. Reagan promised to restore America's strength and prosperity. His campaign slogan was "Let's Make America Great Again."

The voters loved his optimism. That fall, Reagan defeated Carter in a landslide, winning 44 out of 50 states. At the age of 69, Reagan was the oldest president elected up to that time.

President

President Reagan had a plan to defeat the Soviet Union and win the Cold War. Although the Soviets had a powerful military, Reagan knew they had a weak economy and poor technology. He knew America was superior in those two areas and felt it could win the Cold War by focusing on those strengths.

The first thing Reagan needed to do was to revive the nation's economy. At the time, Americans were paying high taxes and suffering through high **inflation**. In 1981, Reagan signed the **Economic Recovery Tax Act**, cutting taxes for the American people. He also supported policies that reduced inflation. These policies boosted the economy and helped create 20 million new jobs. Things were going so well that the voters re-elected Reagan in 1984. This time, Reagan won 49 out of 50 states!

Reagan kept his focus on defeating the Soviets. He believed in "**Peace Through Strength**"—that if America had a strong military, no one, including the Soviets, would want to challenge it. He modernized the military so that it had the most advanced weapons.

In 1985, the Soviet Union chose a new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. He knew that the United States, under Reagan, was getting stronger and stronger. He realized that to keep up with America, he had to change the Soviet system. He began to allow greater freedom in his country.

Reagan continued to keep up the pressure on the Soviets. In June of 1987, he went to Germany and stood in front of the **Berlin Wall**, which the communists built to imprison their own population. Reagan felt that if Gorbachev was really dedicated to freedom, he would get rid of the wall. He gave a speech where he demanded, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" His speech gave hope to millions of people imprisoned behind the wall.

Reagan also worked to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons. He proposed a system called **Strategic Defense Initiative** that he hoped would stop a future nuclear attack. In 1987, he signed the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty** to destroy thousands of nuclear weapons. Reagan remained popular throughout his presidency. His vice president, George H.W. Bush, was elected to succeed him in 1988.



Quote

"General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace... Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"
- June 1987

Assassination Attempt

On March 30, 1981, just a couple of months after taking office, a disturbed young man named John Hinckley Jr. shot President Reagan, striking him in the lung. Reagan had just finished giving a speech at the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C., and was about to enter his limousine when Hinckley began firing.

Although Reagan was the oldest president ever elected at the time, he was also very healthy and muscular. He was even able to walk into the hospital by himself after the shooting. Doctors performed surgery on Reagan, who quickly recovered. Afterward, Reagan even joked with Nancy, "Honey, I forgot to duck."

The American people were very impressed that Reagan reacted so calmly and recovered so quickly after the assassination attempt. Reagan showed the world that he was both courageous and tough.



Sense of Humor

The American people loved President Reagan because of his strong leadership and inspiring speeches—but those weren't the only reasons. They also loved his sense of humor. He loved making jokes and poking fun at communism, his opponents, and even himself. Most politicians seemed boring and stuffy—but not Reagan.

For millions of Americans, Reagan was like a good-natured grandfather. They were able to relate to him easily. Reagan was a strong leader, but he also knew how to have fun. His favorite candy was jelly beans, and he had them ready to snack on at the White House. He also loved watching movies with friends while in the White House.



Retirement

Ronald and Nancy Reagan retired to their home in Southern California. The effects of Reagan's policies continued long after he left office. Since Reagan had put so much pressure on the Soviets, their system began to fall apart. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall indeed fell, as Reagan had hoped. In December 1991, the entire Soviet system collapsed. Millions of people were now free, thanks in part to Reagan's policies. Even future Democratic President Barack Obama, a Reagan critic, later gave him credit, saying, "When the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, I had to give the old man his due…"

Ronald and Nancy enjoyed spending time together during their retirement. Unfortunately, in December 1994, Reagan announced in a letter to the American people that he had been diagnosed with **Alzheimer's disease**. It was a tragic turn of events, but he never lost his sense of optimism. In that letter, he wrote, "I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America, there will always be a bright dawn ahead." Reagan lived the remaining years of his life quietly with Nancy. He died on June 5, 2004, at the age of 93.



Quote

"Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."
- January 1981



Writing Activity

What have you learned about Reagan's life and presidency? List three characteristics that you admire about Reagan, and discuss how you can develop them in yourself.

Quote

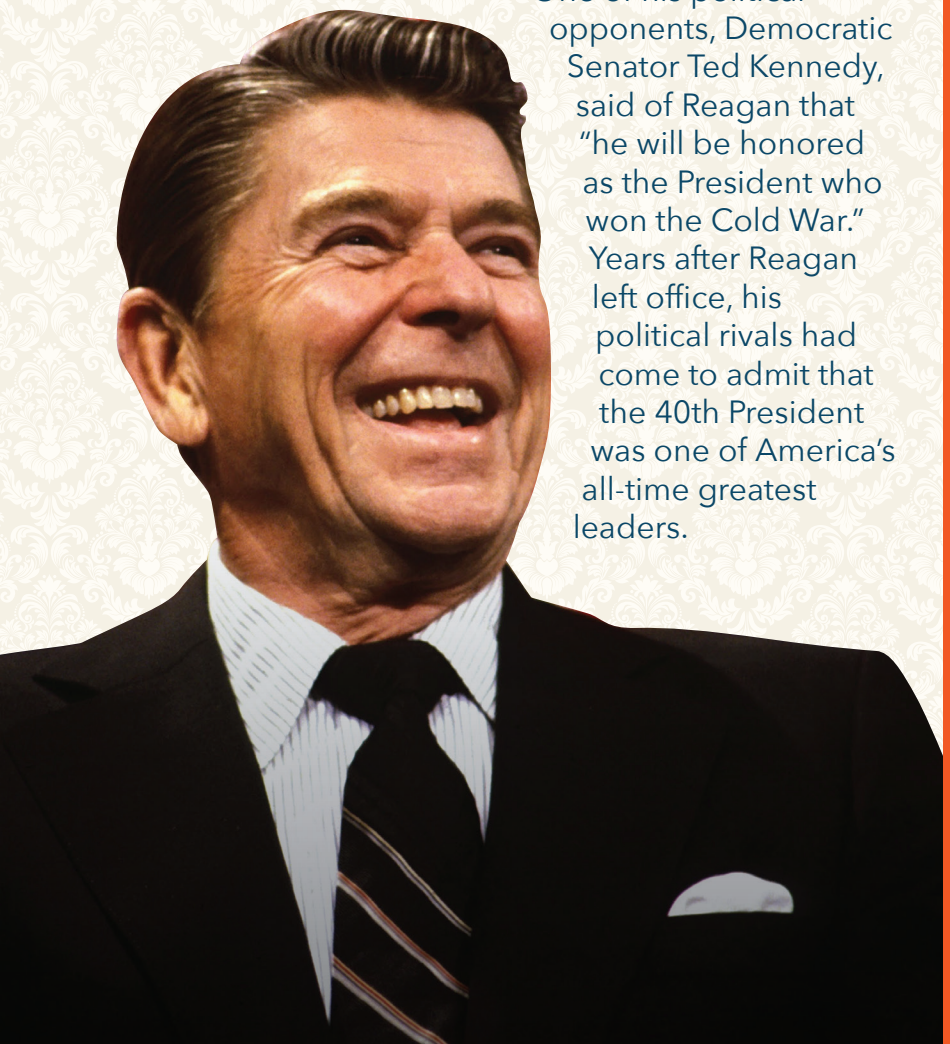
"Peace is the highest aspiration of the American people. We will negotiate for it, sacrifice for it; we will not surrender for it, now or ever."
- January 1981

Legacy

Before Reagan took office, many Americans felt that their nation was falling apart. The country had suffered through the trauma of the Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal. The economy was failing, and the Soviet Union seemed to be moving ahead of the United States.

Reagan took office promising to restore America's greatness. When he left office, the nation's economy was strong once again, and the Soviet Union was beginning to fall apart. The voters believed in Reagan's leadership, electing and reelecting him president in huge landslides.

Prior to Reagan's presidency, many people believed that America couldn't win the Cold War and that it should just accept that the communists would always be around. Reagan refused to believe this. He knew that America could win the Cold War. He dedicated his entire presidency to doing exactly that. Less than two years after he left office, the Soviet Union collapsed.



One of his political opponents, Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy, said of Reagan that "he will be honored as the President who won the Cold War." Years after Reagan left office, his political rivals had come to admit that the 40th President was one of America's all-time greatest leaders.

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Answers

CODENAME FOR REAGAN:
RAWHIDE

Glossary

Hollywood: A famous neighborhood in Los Angeles, California, known as the center of the American film and entertainment industry, where movies and television shows are made.

Labor Union: An official group of workers in a certain trade or profession formed to protect and further their rights and interests.

Communism: A political and economic system where all property and resources are owned and controlled by the government. The result of this system is often dictatorship and government control of every aspect of people's lives.

Cold War: The conflict between America, which was free, and the Soviet Union, which was a communist dictatorship, that lasted from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Soviet Union: A country that existed from 1922 to 1991 which oppressed its people and tried to spread its communist system around the world.

Totalitarian Dictatorship: A form of government where a single ruler or ruling party has complete control over every aspect of people's lives, including their actions, thoughts, and freedoms.

Conservative: A person who believes in the Founding Fathers' principles that government should be limited and should focus on protecting citizens' freedoms.

"Time for Choosing" Speech: A speech Ronald Reagan gave on October 27, 1964, where he explained why he supported Republican candidate Barry Goldwater for president. Reagan eloquently defended the conservative principles of limited government and opposition to communism. Reagan delivered the speech so effectively that many people began encouraging him to run for office. Historians believe the speech launched Reagan's political career.

Great Society: A set of programs signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and 1965. These laws sought to continue the work begun by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in implementing progressive policies. They expanded the size and reach of government in the areas of healthcare, education, the economy, housing, and the environment.

Welfare: Government aid, often in the form of money, to address social problems.

Inflation: A situation where the prices of goods and services generally increase over time, reducing the purchasing power of money.

Economic Recovery Tax Act: A law signed by President Reagan in 1981 that dramatically reduced taxes. It helped spark the prosperity of the rest of the 1980s.

Peace Through Strength: A phrase Ronald Reagan used during his campaigns and presidency in support of a strong military. Reagan believed that if America had a strong military, its enemies would not want to challenge it, which would mean greater peace in the world.

Berlin Wall: A wall built in Germany that separated free West Berlin from East Berlin. The Soviets used the wall to keep people imprisoned under communism in East Berlin and East Germany. President Ronald Reagan famously challenged Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the wall in 1987. Two and a half years later, in November 1989, Europeans suffering under communism broke through the wall, tore it down, and finally enjoyed freedom.

Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI): A proposed missile defense system by the United States during the 1980s that would have used advanced technology to protect against potential nuclear attacks. It was also known as "Star Wars."

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: A treaty signed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1987 which eliminated thousands of nuclear weapons. The treaty helped make the world safer from the threat of nuclear war.

Alzheimer's Disease: A form of dementia that results in the loss of memory and ability to think and communicate verbally.

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