

Notable Quotables

June 21, 2004 (Vol. Seventeen; No. 13)

A bi-weekly compilation of the latest outrageous, sometimes humorous, quotes in the liberal media.



Bringing Political
Balance to the Media

The Liberal Media's Farewell to Ronald Reagan

Blame Reagan for Today's Terror

"The most serious crisis of Ronald Reagan's two terms, and the lowest point in his popularity, came after the revelation that his administration had secretly sold arms to Iran and turned over the profits to rebels fighting the Marxist government of Nicaragua....The fallout was severe, softened only by the President's willingness to accept personal responsibility....U.S. efforts to deal with the tough issues in the Middle East went on hold, helping to set the stage for the first Iraq war and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism."

— CBS's Bill Plante on the June 7 *Evening News*.

Helping the Rich, Hurting the Poor

"At the end of his presidency, a great many people thought he'd made the wealthy wealthier and had not improved life particularly for the middle class."

— Peter Jennings talking to co-host Charles Gibson on ABC's *Good Morning America*, June 10.

"By persuading Congress to approve sweeping tax cuts for the wealthy while slashing welfare benefits and other social services like the federal housing assistance program, Reagan was blamed for a huge surge in the nation's poor and homeless population."

— Associated Press reporter Beth Fouhy, June 9.

"Most of those who are physically, economically or otherwise disadvantaged, deeply resented and still resent his insistence that government is the problem, not the solution. Severe and continuing cutbacks in government services to the poor and vulnerable resulted, and the gulf dividing rich from poor widened."

— Former *New York Times* Washington Bureau Chief R. W. "Johnny" Apple in a June 11 "news analysis."

Homeless Because of Reagan

"Before Reagan, people sleeping in the street were so rare that, outside of skid rows, they were almost a curiosity. After eight years of Reaganomics — and the slashes in low-income housing and social welfare programs that went along with it — they were seemingly everywhere. And America had a new household term: 'The homeless.'"

— Reporter Kevin Fagan in the June 10 *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Nice Man, Cruel Policies

"I used to say I thought if you were down on your luck and you got through the Secret Service, got in the Oval Office and said, 'Mr. President, I'm down on my luck,' he would literally give you the shirt off his back. And then he'd sit down in his undershirt and he'd sign legislation throwing your kids off school lunch program, maybe your parents off Social Security, and of course the Welfare Queen off of welfare."

— ABC's Sam Donaldson, who covered the White House during the 1980s, on *Good Morning America*, June 11.

An Administration of Sleazeballs

"The Reagan presidency also saw....the Iran/Contra affair, the near tripling of the national debt, the fact that 30 — count 'em 30 — of his administration staffers would serve time in jail for bribery, corruption and influence peddling."

— Keith Olbermann on MSNBC's *Countdown*, June 7.

Reagan Mourners Lack Diversity

"Can you tell, Thelma,...if the crowds really look like America? Are they ethnically diverse — African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans — or is it largely white?"

— CNN's Wolf Blitzer asking reporter Thelma Gutierrez about the crowds at Reagan's presidential library during live coverage shortly after 12pm EDT on June 8.

"We haven't seen many African-American faces up at the presidential library, or this morning."

— ABC's Peter Jennings during live coverage as Reagan's casket left Point Mugu Naval Air Station en route to Washington D.C., about 12:13pm EDT on June 9.

Keep Reagan Off Rushmore

Ted Koppel: "There were some fairly contentious issues and he was a fairly controversial President — we've more or less overlooked much of that over the past week. But I suspect as his friends and supporters try to raise to him to the very heights there, and perhaps find a place for him on Mount Rushmore, that some of that controversy and some of the debate will come back."

Peter Jennings: "No doubt about it."

— Exchange during ABC's live coverage of Reagan funeral events about 7:45pm EDT on June 11.

The Media's Record: Ridiculing and Reviling Ronald Reagan

Saddened by Reagan's Hard Heart : Reagan's Nightmarish Legacy

"I was a correspondent in the White House in those days, and my work which consisted of reporting on President Reagan's success in making life harder for citizens who were not born rich, white, and healthy saddened me. My parents raised me to admire generosity and to feel pity. I had arrived in our nation's capital [in 1981] during a historic ascendancy of greed and hard-heartedness."

— *New York Times* then-editorial page editor (and former Washington Bureau Chief) **Howell Raines** in his 1994 book *Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crisis*.

Clueless Prez in "Fantasy Land"

"Pretty simplistic. Pretty old-fashioned. And I don't think they have much application to what's currently wrong or troubling a lot of people....Nor do I think he really understands the enormous difficulty a lot of people have in just getting through life, because he's lived in this fantasy land for so long."

— **NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw** speculating on Reagan's values in *Mother Jones*, April 1983.

"The [Reagan] administration spun the nation out of its torpor with such fantasies as supply side economics, the nuclear weapons 'window of vulnerability,' and the Strategic Defense Initiative."

— *U.S. News & World Report* Senior Editor **Harrison Rainie**, January 1, 1990.

Blaming Reagan for AIDS Deaths

"In the plague years of the 1980s — that low decade of denial, indifference, hostility, opportunism, and idiocy — government fiddled, medicine diddled, and the media were silent or hysterical. A gerontocratic Ronald Reagan took this [AIDS] plague less seriously than Gerald Ford had taken swine flu. After all, he didn't need the ghettos and he didn't want the gays."

— *CBS Sunday Morning TV* critic **John Leonard**, September 5, 1993.

"You place responsibility for the death of your daughter squarely at the feet of the Reagan administration. Do you believe they're responsible for that?"

— **NBC's Maria Shriver** interviewing AIDS sufferer **Elizabeth Glaser** at the Democratic convention July 14, 1992.

Ruing Reagan's Lack of Soul

"All of us who covered the Reagans agreed that President Reagan was personable and charming, but I'm not so certain he was nice. It's hard for me to think of anyone as nice when I hear him say 'The homeless are homeless because they want to be homeless.' To my mind, a President should care about all people, and he didn't, which is why I will always feel Reagan lacked soul."

— **UPI White House reporter Helen Thomas** in the July 1993 *Good Housekeeping*.

"The legacy of the Reagan administration will be with us for years. The deficit under Reagan totaled more than a trillion dollars. Someday we're going to have to pay those bills. As officials look to cut spending and taxes at the same time, we can't afford another round of voodoo economics....I remember that campaign slogan one year 'It's morning again in America.' Well, it may have been morning for some, but for a lot of people in this country it's become a nightmare."

— **CBS 60 Minutes** correspondent **Ed Bradley** in an April 28, 1996 speech to **Benedictine University** in Illinois, aired May 11, 1996 on C-SPAN.

Reaganomics: Rich Got Richer...

"In America in the 1980s, what former President Reagan and those who support him called the Reagan revolution put more money in the pockets of the rich. We already knew that. But a new study indicates that those who did best of all by far were the very richest of the rich."

— **Dan Rather** on the March 5, 1992 *CBS Evening News*.

"Most people seem content to believe that almost everybody had a good time in the '80s, a real shot at the dream. But the fact is, they didn't. Did we wear blinders? Did we think the '80s just left behind the homeless? The fact is that almost nine in ten Americans actually saw their lifestyle decline."

— **Reporter Keith Morrison**, Feb. 7, 1992 *NBC Nightly News*.

...While Poor Suffered in Misery

"After eight years of what many saw as the Reagan administration's benign neglect of the poor and studied indifference to civil rights, a lot of those who lived through this week in Overtown seemed to think the best thing about George Bush is that he is not Ronald Reagan....

There is an Overtown in every big city in America: pockets of misery made even meaner and more desperate the past eight years."

— **ABC's Richard Threlkeld** from a part of **Miami** which had seen riots, on the Jan. 20, 1989 *World News Tonight*.

"As this decade comes to a close, the United States has the highest rate of poverty in the industrial world, 32 million poor people and no one knows exactly how many of them are hungry and homeless. So that 'shining city on a hill' of which President Reagan spoke in his farewell address remains to these Americans a mirage and will remain so until we come to see them — men, women and children — as people like us."

— **Bill Moyers** after **PBS's** re-airing of his 1982 *CBS Reports* "People like Us," June 20, 1989.

"Largely as a result of the policies and priorities of the Reagan administration, more people are becoming poor and staying poor in this country than at any time since World War II."

— **Bryant Gumbel** on **NBC's Today**, July 17, 1989.

No Credit for Winning Cold War

“Some say Ronald Reagan won the Cold War by spending so much on defense that the Kremlin went bankrupt trying to keep up. That won’t wash. During Reagan’s presidency the United States itself became a bankrupt country.”

— **Commentator (and former NBC anchor) John Chancellor on the November 20, 1990 *NBC Nightly News*.**

“The Soviet Union collapsed, the Cold War ended almost overwhelmingly because of internal contradictions and pressures within the Soviet Union and the Soviet system itself. And even if Jimmy Carter had been reelected and been followed by Walter Mondale, something like what we have now seen probably would have happened.”

— ***Time’s* Strobe Talbott, *Inside Washington*, Sept. 21, 1991.**

“People who want to give Ronald Reagan the entire credit for the collapse of the Soviet Union ignore the fact that the Soviet economy was collapsing and the Reagan administration covered it up....The CIA concealed what was happening over there so they could keep the defense budget over here high.”

— ***Newsweek’s* Eleanor Clift on *The McLaughlin Group*, January 15, 1994.**

Reagan’s “Abysmal” Race Record

“I’m kind of surprised at President Reagan, because based on his personal history in Hollywood, I’m surprised he has not been an advocate of civil rights....I had heard that he was very open minded, broad minded person, that he cared about human rights....But the record is abysmal.”

— **CBS News correspondent Lesley Stahl on Howard Cosell’s *Speaking of Everything*, April 10, 1988.**

“The man who sits in the White House [George H. W. Bush] today opposed the Civil Rights Act. So did Ronald Reagan. This crowd is really fighting a retroactive civil rights war to prevent the people they dislike because of their color from achieving success in American life.”

— **PBS’s Bill Moyers in an interview with *Washington Post Magazine* reporter Eric Alterman, Sept. 1, 1991.**

“The gap between white and black [life spans] has remained stubbornly wide, and it increased sharply during the Reagan years, when many social programs that helped minorities were slashed.”

— ***Time* staff writer Christine Gorman in her article from September 16, 1991, “Why Do Blacks Die Young?”**

“We keep looking for some good to come out of this. Maybe it might help in putting race relations on the front burner, after they’ve been subjugated for so long as a result of the Reagan years.”

— **Bryant Gumbel discussing the Los Angeles riots on *NBC’s Today*, April 30, 1992.**

“Reagan...set a standard for exploiting white anger and resentment rarely seen since George Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door.”

— ***Time’s* Jack E. White in a Dec. 14, 2002 Web column.**

Bottom Line: Reagan Ruined Us

• **Don Regan:** “What’s the bottom line of the Reagan administration? It’s a great record.”

• **Lesley Stahl:** “Bottom line: largest deficits in history, largest debtor nation, can’t afford to fix the housing emergency.”

• — **Exchange on *CBS’s Face the Nation*, May 15, 1988.**

His Presidency: One Big Trick

• “The Acting President: Ronald Reagan and the Supporting Players Who Helped Him Create the Illusion That Held America Spellbound”

• — **Title of 1989 book by Bob Schieffer, CBS News Chief Washington Correspondent, and Gary Paul Gates, co-author (with Dan Rather) of *The Palace Guard* a book about the Nixon White House**

• “Reagan’s approval ratings never put him in the top rank of most popular Presidents; that was always a myth. And his confectionary, heavily scripted presidency tended to lead the country backward.”

• — ***Newsweek* Senior Writer Jonathan Alter, December 31, 1991 news story.**

Tax Cuts Left America Bankrupt

• “It now seems the time has come to pay the fiddler for our costly dance of the Reagan years.”

• — **Bryant Gumbel talking about a budget deal involving higher taxes, on *NBC’s Today*, May 9, 1990.**

• “We wanted everything but the pain of paying for it. It began with a promise from a new President....In a decade [the] deficit more than tripled. How? Ronald Reagan ran for President promising Americans more while asking for less: the Reagan Revolution.”

• — **Tom Brokaw on *NBC Nightly News*, October 5, 1990.**

• “Reagan got his taxation program through, which was to cut taxes to the bone. Mr. Clinton’s going to get his program through, which is to raise taxes to the sky. And let us hope, Cokie, that it doesn’t turn out to have a similar fate. What Reagan did was destroy the economy!”

• — **ABC’s Sam Donaldson on *This Week with David Brinkley*, March 28, 1993.**

He Emptied Government’s Coffers

• “Our viewers remember from 1980 to 1988, Ronald Reagan said he could cut taxes, increase defense, and still balance the budget. The deficit under Ronald Reagan doubled. The debt tripled, and home mortgage rates were 12 percent. It didn’t work then. Why would it work now?”

• — ***Meet the Press* host Tim Russert to GOP presidential candidate Steve Forbes, September 24, 1995.**

• “The borrow-and-spend policies that Ronald Reagan presided over have bequeathed to his chosen successor a downsized presidency devoid of the resources to address long neglected domestic problems.”

• — **Reporters Michael Duffy and Richard Hornik in *Time*, February 20, 1989.**

Baffled by Reagan's Popularity

"I predict historians are going to be totally baffled by how the American people fell in love with this man and followed him the way we did."

— CBS's Lesley Stahl on NBC's *Later with Bob Costas*, January 11, 1989.

Ronald Reagan's Wretched Legacy

"By many measures, the Reagan administration was a failure. It left us with a huge debt and an unfocused domestic policy. It got us in a moral mess with Irangate and a military disaster in Lebanon."

— NBC News President Michael Gartner reviewing Lou Cannon's book, *President Reagan: Role of a Lifetime in The Washington Post*, April 21, 1991.

"I think it's a dangerous failure at least in terms of programs. A mess in Central America, neglect of the poor, corruption in government....And the worst legacy of all, the budget deficit, the impoverishment of our children."

— *U.S. News & World Report* Editor Roger Rosenblatt summarizing the Reagan record during CBS News GOP Convention coverage, August 15, 1988.

"Analysts will also recognize that Ronald Reagan presided over a meltdown of the federal government during the last eight years. Fundamental management was abandoned in favor of rhetoric and imagery....Only now are we coming to realize the cost of Mr. Reagan's laissez-faire."

— CBS reporter Terence Smith in a *New York Times* op-ed piece, November 5, 1989.

"Although most Americans benefitted, the gap between the richest and poorest became a chasm....Cuts in social programs created a homeless population that grew to exceed that of Atlanta. AIDS became an epidemic in the 1980s, nearly 50,000 died. Reagan largely ignored it."

— Narrator of PBS *American Experience* profile of Ronald Reagan, February 24, 1998.

Ask a Biased Question...

"President Reagan was unfair to the poor."

"He was a rich man's President."

"He had a negative view on women's rights."

"He was unfair to blacks."

"He didn't know what he was doing."

"He was unfair to the middle class."

"He was unfair to old people."

— Statements people were asked to agree or disagree with in *Washington Post/ABC News* poll released June 30, 1988.

Reagan, an '80s Low Point

"The decade had its highs (Gorbachev, Bird)...

...and the decade had its lows (Reagan, AIDS)"

— *Boston Globe* headlines over '80s reviews by the paper's columnists, December 28, 1989.

Did He Realize How Bad He Was?

"He talked about being proud of what's happened with the economy, about the millions of new jobs that have been created. And as I listened to that, I also thought one out of five babies born in the United States are born into poverty. There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country now that are homeless, have no place to live. I wonder, how does your father reconcile that in his mind? How does he reconcile those two things?"

— CBS *This Morning* co-host Harry Smith to Maureen Reagan on January 12, 1989, the morning after President Reagan's farewell address.

"A Wallflower at the Orgy"

"In the corporate takeovers of the 1980s, the Reagan administration was a wallflower at the orgy."

— First sentence of *Time* Associate Editor Richard Lacayo's Feb. 27, 1995 sidebar on Microsoft anti-trust case.

Reagan the Unintelligent Airhead

"They [Reagan and British Prime Minister Thatcher] quickly formed a bond that overcame their differences of age, gender and — many whisper — IQ scores."

— *Washington Post* reporter David Broder, May 27, 1989.

"Good morning. The Gipper was an airhead! That's one of the conclusions of a new biography of Ronald Reagan that's drawing a tremendous amount of interest and fire today, Monday, September the 27th, 1999."

— NBC co-host Katie Couric opening *Today* before an interview with Reagan biographer Edmund Morris, who actually wrote that President Reagan was "an apparent airhead." He told Couric, "He was a very bright man."

A Loser Compared to Nixon

"Let's not debate his presidency, but his passing. As opposed to a man like Reagan, Nixon is, was highly regarded as a genuine statesman with a first-class mind."

— Bryant Gumbel, April 26, 1994 *Today*.

Not If Journalists Write It

"I don't think history has any reason to be kind to him."

— CBS's Morley Safer recalling the late Ronald Reagan on CNN's *Larry King Live*, June 14, 2004.

Notable Quotables

PUBLISHER: L. Brent Bozell III

EDITORS: Brent H. Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham

MEDIA ANALYSTS: Geoffrey Dickens, Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Brad Wilmoth, Ken Shepherd, Megan McCormack

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE: Kristina Sewell

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Jennifer Bookwalter

INTERNS: Mary Fisher, Jennifer Schwarz

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