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While Reporters Now Praise Reagan's Humor & Optimism, They Disdained His Conservative Policies

Liberal Media's Reagan-Bashing Record

Many journalists found kind things to say about former President Ronald Reagan in the days following his death on Saturday. During ABC's live coverage on Saturday, Sam Donaldson applauded Reagan as "a tireless optimist" whose policies "changed history for the better." On Sunday's *Today* show, NBC's Katie Couric saluted the late President as "a true patriot." On Monday's *Early Show*, CBS reporter Bill Plante, who covered the White House during the 1980s, recalled to co-host Harry Smith how "it was impossible not to like the man."

But few reporters have offered positive judgments of any specific Reagan policies or accomplishments. Outgoing NBC anchor Tom Brokaw was one of the boldest, telling Brian Williams on a special Saturday night *Dateline* that "I think he probably deserves as much credit as any other single individual for the collapse of the Soviet Union."

Such substantive praise was rare. Most of the encomiums this week have come from the mouths of former Reagan administration officials and everyday citizens lauding Reagan's greatness, not journalists — some of whom are already fretting that this week's coverage has been too positive. That matches their longstanding bias against Reagan's conservative policies, for even before he left office in 1989, liberal journalists were warning the public that Ronald Wilson Reagan was really a failure, not among the greatest American leaders of the 20th century:

RONALD REAGAN DESTROYED THE ECONOMY

■ "If there is any President who does not deserve credit for our current economic prosperity it is Ronald Reagan. The latter part of the 1980s will go down as one of the most poorly-managed, economically reckless fiscal periods in American history." — PBS *To the Contrary* host Bonnie Erbe in a February 28, 1998 syndicated column.

Reagan's Legacy: An American Nightmare

"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.

■ "Reagan got his taxation program through, which was to cut taxes to the bone....What Reagan did was destroy the economy!" — ABC's Sam Donaldson on *This Week with David Brinkley*, March 28, 1993.

■ "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.

■ "The trouble is that Ronald Reagan left us with the check. He may not remember all this, but he left us with a \$3 trillion debt." — Then-*San Francisco Examiner* Washington Bureau Chief Chris Matthews on *Good Morning America*, January 4, 1995.

REAGAN LACKED COMPASSION

■ "The Reagan years oppressed me because of the callousness and the greed and the hard-hearted attitude toward people who have very little in this society." — Howell Raines, the *New York Times* Washington Bureau during

the Reagan era, in his 1994 book *Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crisis*.

■ "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.

■ "During the last twelve years, the country was arming itself to the teeth, the deficit was growing, the economic classes were being wrenched apart...Reaganism essentially estranged everybody from everybody, rich and poor." — *NewsHour* essayist Anne Taylor Fleming on PBS, December 31, 1993.

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MEDIA'S REAGAN BASHING RECORD (cont.)

REAGAN WAS CRUEL TO POOR PEOPLE...

■ "[Reagan's legacy] is 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."

— Then-*U.S. News & World Report* Editor Roger Rosenblatt, CBS's convention coverage, August 15, 1988.

■ "And so it goes with President Bozo...coming to the end of his eight-year reign, and reign it has been, no matter how it rained on the poor. The hell with the poor, it's their own fault; we all feel that way." — *Boston Globe* Associate Editor and longtime reporter David Nyhan, in a December 28, 1988 column.

...BUT AIDED GREEDY RICH

■ "In America in the 1980s, what former President Reagan and those who support him call 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 *CBS Evening News*, March 5, 1992.

■ "The amazing thing is 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." — NBC reporter Keith Morrison, February 7, 1992 *Nightly News*.

REAGAN WAS AN UNINTELLIGENT AIRHEAD

■ "Good morning. The Gipper was an airhead!" — Co-host Katie Couric opening NBC's *Today*, September 27, 1999.

■ "They [Reagan and 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.

RUINOUS REAGAN FOOLED THE PUBLIC

■ "We went through a trance with a mesmerizing leader and enjoyed the moment. You remember it was good morning again, morning again in America, and the sun was always coming up. No dark clouds, live for the moment, don't worry about the debts, don't worry about tomorrow, don't worry about paying them off, don't worry about the long-term future....That's the legacy." — Former *Washington Post* editor Haynes Johnson on *Today*, March 12, 1991.

■ "[Bush] is about to make matters worse by hauling out Ronald Reagan at the Republican convention. Reagan has become a symbol of what went wrong in the '80s. It's like bringing the Music Man back to River City, a big mistake." — *Newsweek's* Eleanor Clift on the August 1, 1992 *McLaughlin Group*.

■ "The best evidence I can give that we do a lousy job covering politics is to look at the politicians: Ronald Reagan was President of us for eight years — Ronald Reagan! Reporters should have been writing for the entire eight years of his reign that this man was gone, out of it....He should have been covered as a clown."

— Then-NBC News reporter Bob Herbert at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism in the fall of 1992, as reported in *National Review*, June 21, 1993.

■ "I predict historians are going to be totally baffled by how 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.

EVEN RICHARD NIXON WAS BETTER

■ "As opposed to a man like Reagan, Nixon is, was, highly regarded as a genuine statesman with a first-class mind." — Bryant Gumbel after President Nixon's death, on the April 26, 1994 *Today* on NBC.

— Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Rich Noyes and Jessica Anderson

...And He Didn't Win Cold War, Either!

"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."

— 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."

— Former *Time* Editor-at-Large Strobe Talbott on *Inside Washington*, September 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."

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

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Katie Wright at (703) 683-5004.