

The War on Ronald Reagan

one wishes or feels to be true instead of what is actually true.” While the word has since brought laughter to many, it is no laughing matter that over the past two decades the American public’s understanding of historical truths has been intentionally and systematically revised by influential and radical conservative voices across the nation. Through their efforts, they have metaphorically gone back in time and rewritten history in an effort to manipulate American minds into having a false and misconstrued recollection of past historical events. The result has been unfortunate as by changing how the past is remembered, conservatives have succeeded in creating two separate and parallel historical timelines. On one timeline there exists historical truth, fact, and understanding. But, on the tangent timeline only “truthiness” exists.

What follows is not a joyful story of how a historical topic is growing and becoming richer and more dynamic in enhancing our understanding of how history and the present-day events interrelate. By narrowing down our and studying the historiography of former president Ronald Reagan, evidence will show that efforts to embellish, simplify, and exaggerate the legacy left by the former president have existed since throughout approximately the past few decades. I will argue that conservative forces intent on misinforming the general population have been waging propaganda campaigns against scholars who believe in and pursue credible, fair, and balanced public debate regarding the lasting impact of the Reagan’s presidency.

In 1999, a study conducted by professor of political science Paul Kengor found that the common perception that many conservatives have that the academic community is filled with “liberal elites” who write history to promote their left-wing agenda is misleading. He cites that in the early 1990s, a national poll conducted of professional historians and political scientists showed that indeed 88% of those surveyed considered themselves to be liberals. However, in 1994, a separate poll questioning specifically 481 historians asked how each ranked thirty-seven former U.S. presidents in terms of “greatness.” That survey indicated that Reagan indeed ranked towards the bottom as he finished twenty-eighth on the list. But, regardless of the his low ranking, by studying journals written by historians, presidential scholars, and political scientists over a five-year span, Kengor realized that (nonetheless) the majority all gave impartial and unbiased reviews when writing about Reagan’s historical legacy. Kengor writes that “Reagan’s treatment by academics is far better than many people, especially many conservatives, might surmise it to be. Contrary to expectation, many articles in the top journals have been fair, as have a number of influential books.”¹

Kengor, in particular gave a great deal of praise to *The Presidential Quarterly* as he found that academic journal to be most balanced of the ones he studied. But, it should not go unnoticed that when scholars write about one specific person (in this case the president) the “great man” theory of history will naturally result. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that Kengor concluded that a journal focusing solely on the presidency was deserving of the most praise.

After studying how Reagan was portrayed in academic journals, Kengor then analyzed if a liberal bias existed in undergraduate history textbooks. In order to do so, he created what he called a “Reagan litmus test” of which he filtered each book through when he conducted his investigation. His “litmus test” determined that, in contrast to how Reagan was depicted in academic journals, the textbook coverage was tremendously “disheartening” and Reagan was not given “the coverage he deserves.”² While being disheartened and disappointed that the textbooks were (in his opinion) historically inaccurate, Kengor does consider and conclude that the academic journals he studied were still an excellent contribution to the academic community. He states, the “individual journal articles by leading academics, including, of course, liberal academics, have been surprisingly fair and increasingly positive, as have a handful of highly influential books by the very best presidential scholars and historians.”³ In summary, as a member of the academic community himself, Kengor found that by 1999, professors of history had nonetheless provided readers with a fair assessment when they wrote about the Reagan presidency.

In the late 90s Reagan’s place in history was already being debated between liberals and conservatives. Then, starting and continuing in the twenty-first century, the history of Ronald Reagan significantly changed resulting in two separate yet equally viable historical narratives existing side by side. In effect, the dueling narratives written about Reagan have often been in conflict with each other the outcome has created what can be referred to as a “War on Ronald Reagan.”

After Reagan passed away in 2004, the amount of historical literature written about him radically increased. It is undoubtedly true that more “tribute” books would be written which would describe Reagan in a more heroic sense. Of the plethora of publications written (and still being written) about the former president, the majority however read less as “tribute books” but more towards conservative propaganda being used to advance their political agenda. As we shall see, historical trends have shown that numerous conservatives have recently summoned the ghost of Reagan in order to embellishing his appreciable qualities which (in actuality) most conservatives in recent years have (arguably) lacked.

Historian Douglas C. Rossinow best explains the conservative effort to utilize Reagan’s legacy to their own advantage as he reviewed three different books published on the subject in the twenty-first century. The three books he reviewed were *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* (2007) by historian Robert M. Collins, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (2005) by political historian Gil Troy, and *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (2005) by historian John Ehrman. Rossinow’s allows us to see how after the death of Reagan his historiography dramatically changed and rather than being insightful contributions to the academic community the books were to the contrary. Rossinow summarizes his reviews by stating:

Overall, these books are marred by unreflected, often unsubstantiated repetition of catchphrases and interpretations whose origins

lie in the impressive Republican-conservative propaganda apparatus of the past quarter-century. At times the authors appear to strive sincerely for interpretive 'balance.' Yet the concept of balance at work here is not that of synthesizing alternative interpretations, each of which has an established integrity and plausibility. Instead it is a crude partisan concept of balance. The authors import into historical writing the intellectual procedures and standards of today's cable television news coverage.⁴

Granted all historical writing involves some type of cherry picking of evidence as it is simply impossible to write history without selective incorporation of evidence. But, in the historical community, acknowledging that there are two sides to every story demonstrates credibility, writing proficiency, and adherence to professionalism. Rossinow would agree as his book reviews prove that history written for strictly propaganda purposes are a cancer in the academic world.

Historians have always tended to resist writing about the recent past. That indeed is a tradition that is far too common in the academic community and I believe the reluctance of many to participate in such endeavors needs to be removed. In the case of Reagan, since his first year in office in 1980, over three decades have passed which (contrary to what many perceive to be unapproachable) I consider that to be more than enough time to analyze historical events of that time period. Rossinow agrees as he answers his own question as to what the explanation is for the insurmountable number of embarrassing flaws that exist in history books published about Reagan. Rossinow writes, "Some may think it is simply impossible to write high- quality history about the recent past, but I do not agree ... The recentness of the 1980s is no excuse for low intellectual standards in writing the period's history."⁵

Rossinow further argues that the historically accurate and unbiased narratives about the former president have been replaced with fairytale stories written to advance the agenda of partisan right-wing politicians. The rift between conservative and liberal cross-party governmental relations that have slowly expanded in recent years effectively mirrors what has been written in the history books about Reagan. Rossinow explains this perfectly when he states that:

Rightist foundations and 'think tanks' which produce 'ceaseless love letters to Reagan' which in recent years has made historians of this period may feel compelled to credit views and interpretations solely for their popular resonance, not for their proven validity, or else lose a big chunk of their potential audience.⁶

The historiography of Reagan written throughout the twenty-first century has resulted in a large amount of the people across the nation having only the "impression" that Reagan should have more honor and praise bestowed upon him. By over utilizing the "great man" approach to writing history, right-wing writers of Reagan history have practically created a national conservative collective of Reagan-worshippers. As Rossinow's reviews show us, far right-wing conservative historians in the twenty-first century have largely minimized anything that may lead readers to have an unfavorable opinion as to how they remember the Reagan presidency. In contrast to the 1999 historiographical study conducted by Kengor, after the election of President George W. Bush in 2000, Reagan history slowly began to take a turn for the worst.

In an article written by historian Matthew Dallek, he informs that just one year prior to Reagan's death, conservative efforts to control how American minds "should" remember the former president were already well underway. Dallek writes that in 2003, CBS planned to air an unflattering television mini-series about Ronald and Nancy Reagan of which conservatives took great offense and urged people to boycott the network. Bowing to the pressures to not be perceived as an unpatriotic television network, CBS never aired the program and instead it aired on the premium cable channel Showtime which (as we all know) has a dramatically smaller viewing audience compared to over the air stations like CBS. Dallek writes that the Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie went as far as to call upon CBS to "provide disclaimers announcing that the program was fiction."⁷ Of course, whether a famous historical figure is presented in a positive or negative sense, if he or she is portrayed in a historically accurately fashion it is ludicrous to label it as fiction.

Gillespie's statement back in 2003 perfectly exemplifies how, in the years after, the exaggerated historical impact of Reagan that conservatives presented to the public would sway more and more towards historically inaccurate proportions. In 2008, historian Charles L. Ponce de Loen explains that after leaving the Whitehouse, Reagan still remains a highly controversial and polarizing figure who is seen as "a hero to conservatives, who yearn for the emergence of another politician of 'Reaganesque' stature, but a malign revanchist in the eyes of many liberals and leftists, who blame him for setting the nation on a disastrous new course." As Rossinow believes, so too does Ponce de Leon that the "sharply divergent views of Reagan have also colored perceptions of the 1980s, a period that has only recently attracted the attention of historians."⁸ In other words, as Rossinow, Ponce de Leon, and I would agree, the door into the 1980s is now open and historians (for the sake of preventing history from being further contaminated with mythology) should enter the domain.

Rather than historians focusing their studies too far back into the past and continually writing about history of which an insurmountable amount of material already exists, it would be in the best interest that those in the historical profession begin to focus more on analyzing the history of the 1980s and 1990s as those years are contain more "fertile soil" of which the fruits have already ripened and consumption can now take place. As the twenty-first century historiography written about Reagan has shown us, the benefits of putting history back on the right course are very relevant today as the existing Reagan literature has strayed too far off into the tangent-historical timeline. The aforementioned sampling of historians who have already written on the subject would more than likely agree.

In 2008, Professor of Public Affairs Hugh Heclo provided readers with a warning of which historians and other members of the academic community must further acknowledge. He writes that "given that it is scarcely 20 years since (Reagan) left office, we are only just now entering the middle distance where one can start gaining a reasonable historical perspective." He adds that too many people view the iconic and idolized image of Reagan differently because:

Political activists know that shaping public understanding of the past is an essential part of contending for the future. Any fair appraisal of the Reagan legacy is difficult precisely because partisans on all sides want their listeners to believe that the truth of things must always be simple.⁹

As recent presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 have shown us, a growing rift between the Republican and Democratic Parties has and continues to develop in the U.S. government. Based on the very narrow margin of victory in each of the elections, it is well known that the American public is now very fervently divided between conservative and liberal ideologies. The extreme partisanship that divides the nation has perverted and infested the way of which history is being written and remembered across the nation.

Conservative efforts of manipulating Reagan's legacy have proven successful as the existing literature and national dialog has proven that the minds of millions across the country have a polluted understanding of the former president. A study of the existing literature on the president has shown that the country is now divided between partisan political lines which conservatives primarily view Reagan as figure that represents all the great aspects of their political agenda whereas liberals and those in the academic community have noticed that the idol-worship of Reagan is undeserving and not true. The split has not been beneficial to the academic community as the academic and (most importantly) non-academic conservatives have stereotyped reason and knowledge as being historically inaccurate while their own warped historical narrative (primarily based on spreading falsehoods and misinformation) has made ignorance a virtue.

Any attempt at "shaping" how people view a historical figure requires a public that is willing to believe that the narrative they are hearing is credible, valid, and accurate. At times, historical studies have focused too often on those who "create" history instead of those who "take in" the history being written.

Using the media to spread propaganda to advance or undermine a political cause has and will always be effective when the few try to manipulate the minds of the many. In specific, the Republican Party since the late 1970s has used radio, television, and the internet to further spread belief in their political agenda and win over the hearts and minds of the American public. Reagan, as a former Hollywood actor, understood the power of presenting himself as a man of the people. Generally speaking, image is everything in politics through the use of propaganda the message being spread becomes less relevant compared to messenger who is delivering the information.

It is logical for us to assume that after the Watergate scandal which led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, the Republican Party learned what it had to do in order to win better control over the minds of how people see what virtues are inherent in their party. After Watergate, in order to prevent damaging information from being leaked to the public (such as the Pentagon Papers), the Republican Party learned it had to gain more control over the media. By doing so, if a story were to break damaging the image of their party, such news would need to take backseat to other less relevant news stores.

In 2009, author Charles P. Pierce explains in vivid detail how in the twenty-first century Republicans not only succeeded but did so beyond their wildest expectations of controlling the flow of national news and resulting public discourse. Pierce suggests that the Republican marriage with media outlets was a match made in heaven as when the forces combined they were more easily able to instill in people's minds the impression that their party made was good, is good, and will be good for the nation if they support their political ideology. Essentially, by conservative media outlets continually distorting and twisting the past, history has been rewritten and people's minds have been altered leaving a large part of the population expressing their anger in the wrong directions.

Pierce explains conservatives' efforts to redirect people's rage perfectly when he states that the false narratives and stereotyping of liberals as being a collective of people intent on destroying democracy and freedom represents:

The ascendancy of the notion that the people we should trust the least are the people who know best what they're talking about. In the new media age, everybody is a historian, or a scientist, or a preacher, or a sage. And if everyone is an expert, then nobody is, and the worst thing you can be in a society where everybody is an expert is, well, an actual expert.¹⁰

By using the intelligence of academic elites against themselves, a fear and outright lie is spread throughout the airwaves that the academic elite part of a conspiracy out to advance their "liberal" ideology to undermine and destroy the very foundations of freedom and free-market capitalism of which the country has always enjoyed. Pierces states that by creating and perpetrating the "liberal conspiracy" die-hard conservatives across the country see themselves as "beset on all sides by powerful liberal elites"¹¹ who believe that anything can be true if someone says is loudly enough. Based on the survey data collected by Kengor, it is indeed a valid statement that historians in the academic community overwhelming consider themselves to be liberals. However, the stigma conservative pundits have recently attached to the word "liberal" has led many of their followers to reason that because historians are liberals, and all liberals are to be feared, then history as told by historians makes them the part of the "liberal conspiracy" to spread of lies and disinformation to further their ideology that cannot be trusted.

One could easily call such accusations by conservative forces against historical intelligence as creating a "war on facts" against the academic community. Former Vice President Al Gore summarizes how the Republican Party was able to accomplish making the public believe less of what is actually true but more of what "feels" to be true. In other words, they have replaced truth with truthiness. Gore states that the Republican Party's attack on knowledge and those in the academic community started being used in the late twentieth-century. The attacks were used as primarily propaganda for individuals (primarily staunch conservative leaders) to "disguise their impulse to power by cloaking it in clever and seductive intellectual formulations." He adds that education itself can become suspect and regardless of something being true "when ideology is so often woven into the 'facts' that are delivered in full formed and self-contained packages, people naturally begin to develop some cynicism about what they are being told." He writes that advocacy organizations have "exclusive possession of the truth and merely have to 'educate' others about what they already know."¹²

When conservatives need to pass themselves off as having facts and history on their side, passing themselves off as being "Reagan-like" requires minimum effort. Regardless of truth, reason, and facts, the American public has proven it will believe in what they are being told by their admired leaders to be true. Advertising Reagan as a man worthy of hero worship wrongly provides people who support the Republican Party the impression that history is on their side. In political games played between Democrats and Republicans, the later has and continues to play what I like to call the "Reagan Card." It is just one of many of cards they hold that can be played whenever a

conservative politician needs a historical figure to associate themselves with. Whether or not the comparison they make is historically valid and credible is beside the point because they have truthiness on their side.

Like Gore, legendary historian Richard Hofstadter also warned of the dangers of pitting intellectuals and non-intellectuals against one another. In 1963, in almost prophetic language, he stated:

The case against intellect is founded on a set of fictional wholly abstract antagonisms. Intellect is pitted against feeling, on the ground that is somehow inconsistent with our emotion. It is pitted against character, because it is widely believed that intellect stands for mere cleverness, which transmutes easily into the sly and diabolical. It is pitted against practicality, since theory is held to be opposed to practice. It is pitted against democracy, since intellect is felt to be a form of distinction that defies egalitarianism ... Once the validity of these antagonisms is accepted, then the case for intellect ... is lost.[13](#)

In the twenty-first century, Hofstadter's warning about intellectual history being stigmatized as diabolical as was as true back then as it is today. When Reagan died in June of 2004, so too did the majority of his historical legacy. Republicans armed with their already contorted history of Reagan then started efforts to further increase the impression that their present day political platform was what was best for the nation. The party then unanimously united and Reagan's 1980s financial policies were deemed the "scared scrolls" of which glory, prosperity, and freedom were conceived. But, they also used the glorious legacy left by Reagan against their rivals in the Democratic Party and also "liberal scholars" who believed in and were conspiring to tear down the foundation that Reagan built of which any virtues the nation was founded on would be corrupted and destroyed by the two combined sinister forces.

Will Bunch, author of one of the most detailed books on Reagan mythology would definitely agree with the aforementioned Hofstadter quote as he writes that:

Two decades after Reagan's last day in the Oval office, his distorted legacy continues to haunt our future. It happens every time an American leader chooses to ignore the messy realities of science, it happens every time a new tax cut is proposed in a time of war and rising debts, and it increasingly happens in the arena of foreign policy."[14](#)

For the benefit of the nation, efforts are thankfully underway in the academic community to restore constructive and beneficial debate back in public discourse. Efforts to prevent the tangent historical timeline from spreading farther away from reality are well underway. Bunch's 2009 book written to "tear down the myths" that surround Reagan history is one such example. Bunch argues that five myths have been created and fed into the public conscious by right-wing conservatives who are intent on poisoning people's mind by hijacking the former president's legacy in order to turn him into a "bronze icon" to revive their fading ideology.

Bunch shatters the first myth spread about Reagan that he was one of the most popular and liked presidents of all time. But, in reality, his average approval rating was 52.8% and when he left office that put him behind former president Jimmy Carter.

The second myth, which seems to be at the forefront of all modern day Republican economic policies, is that Reagan sponsored tax cuts for the wealthy led to increased prosperity for the majority of people throughout the country. But, in reality, blue-collar Americans paid higher income taxes in the eight years of his presidency and only the wealthy elite had their taxes cut. The result, lasting to this day, has been an unfathomable amount of wealth concentrated in the hands of less than one percent of the population. In what is commonly referred to as trickle-down or voodoo economics, most economists currently point out the failed policy which does not actually lead to wealth trickling down was conceived and implemented during the Reagan presidency.[15](#)

The third myth that Bunch explains to be an utterly absurd is that Reagan was a hawk, who, by his usage of intimidating and aggressive rhetoric, near singlehandedly drove the communist Soviet Union into submission. It is true that standing firm against the "evil empire" during the Cold War (of course) threatened the lives of millions if not billions of people. Reagan is deserving of a great deal of credit and most historians (including myself) agree that he is worthy of such praise. But, in reality, peace talks and a willingness to negotiate arms reduction with Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev made the Cold War (as most scholars agree) end with a whimper and not with a bang. The embellished narrative that the U.S. simply out spent the Soviet Union and used the threat of a "first-strike" nuclear policy to its benefit is misleading. Throughout the Reagan presidency the majority of those in the Republican Party were strongly opposed to the U.S. making any concessions to the Soviets as they considered peace conferences and negotiations with the enemy as a sign of weakness that threatened the fate of the nation.

In regards to nuclear disarmament and ending the "Star Wars" program, Reagan himself showed he was anything but a hawk. In fact, he advocated in his farewell speech that the world would not know peace until nuclear weapons have been abolished. Today, the willingness of Washington bureaucrats (whether conservative or liberal) has shown almost no intentions to lower the military budget which accounts for the majority of all government spending.

The fourth myth, that Reagan shrank the federal government, is as also proven to be a falsehood by Bunch. In reality, during the Reagan presidency the number of government employees grew from roughly 2.8 to 3 million with the majority of those hired working in the defense industry.[16](#)

The fifth and final myth that Bunch shows to be fabricated by conservatives is the misunderstanding that Reagan was a religious and cultural warrior who (without compromise) stood strong against ferocious Democratic Party resistance and successfully restored traditional Victorian values back into the nations' conscious. But, in reality (as has been stated in all five of the myths), Reagan was a compromiser and those who have studied his history generally have come to the consensus agreement that Reagan more often worked with Democrats rather than against them.

Landmark Supreme Court cases decided throughout Reagan's presidency provide us with an excellent example of how throughout the

twentieth-century liberal laws and social reforms did not change despite a strong effort by right-wing conservatives to rewrite the meaning of the Constitution. Historian and constitutional lawyer Barry Friedman explains this failed attempt all too well as he writes that during the Reagan presidency “conservatives came to understand that in order to overturn decisions they disfavored, they had to rewrite constitutional law itself.” Furthermore, he adds that conservatives (regardless of the constitution being seen as a “living document” since the 1930s) ignored previous Supreme Court decisions as they “tailored their approach to serve their ideological ends.”[17](#)

It is an indisputable fact that in spite of continual efforts from large anti-abortion advocacy groups (such as “Right to Life”) and conservative politicians, Roe v. Wade was never overturned. As evidence, in the case City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health, Inc. a plethora of regulations enacted during the early 1980s were passed in numerous states to add obstacles for pregnant mothers to get an abortion. Historian Stanley Kutler states that the “1980 Republican platform supported a constitutional amendment restricting abortion and, following his victory, President Ronald Reagan repeatedly endorsed such an amendment.” However, of course, all of the regulations were invalidated and despite the Court’s repeated reaffirmation of their decision in Roe conservatives to this day are still near unanimously anti-abortion.[18](#) The conclusion writes itself, proclaiming and revising history to spread the idea that Reagan was a true savior for conservative cultural ideology is simply not true.

While Bunch indeed does a great job in proving Reagan-mythology makers wrong, a criticism can be made that his book is too much of an effort to make readers see liberals as the saviors of truth and conservatives to be skilled liars. A valid argument can be made that the author’s liberal bias is indeed too obvious and noticeable. Granted, the distorted Reagan legacy has been derived almost exclusively from conservatives. But, some of the “myths” that Bunch debunks does not give credit where credit is due as certainly Reagan is deserving of “some” praise and appreciation depending upon how far myths have strayed from the consensus agreement in the academic world.

For example, historian Paul Kengor has kept up his efforts to keep Reagan debates from growing to unreasonable and unprofessional proportions. Working in collaboration with historian Peter Schweizer, in 2005 they published a collection of eleven well-written and (most significantly) not politically slanted essays in an effort to provide readers with a “fair and objective analysis of Ronald Reagan; their goal (the authors of the articles within) is to inform, to enlighten, and to bring us closer to the real Reagan and his presidency.”[19](#) They acknowledge what is obvious to most people that there are always two sides to every story and each needs to be told so people can fairly assess and form an opinion on Reagan’s legacy. A fair historical debate surely still exists in the academic community and that has proven to be very beneficial for all who study the former president.

In recent years, collective efforts continue throughout the academic community to reestablish balanced and meaningful discussion about Reagan’s legacy. As an example, in 2007, a collection of essays by four different Reagan historians was published in book form. In the introduction, historian Kyle Longley informs that the book was a reclaiming effort created to “provoke thought and debate, thereby achieving the kind of balanced and rational approach that often has been absent in examinations of the Reagan presidency, as those who admired or despised him have dominated the debate.”[20](#)

Reclaiming the history of Reagan from conservative forces looking to benefit their own agenda will not come easily. In 2007, extremely far-right conservative Grover Norquist started the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project (RRLP). On their website, they state that among their goals is to have the governor of every state proclaim February 6th as “Ronald Reagan Day.” They also promote their desire to “eventually see a statue, park, or road named after Reagan in all 3,140 counties in the United States.” It does not take much effort to realize that the project exists for outright propaganda purposes as they come right out and say that by renaming landmarks after Reagan it will “serve as a teaching moment for those who were not yet alive during his presidency or to grant those who remember him with the opportunity to reflect on his accomplishments.” As early 1998, the RRLP succeeded in renaming National Airport to (which comes as no surprise) Ronald Reagan National Airport. In effect, the RRLP obviously does not exist solely to “teach” those who were not yet alive about how great they consider Reagan to be. But those who were alive and whose memories about the man have faded will without a doubt end up being “re-taught” what they do not remember.[21](#)

Conservative columnist George Will stated his opinion about RRLP’s agenda in very dramatic fashion when he stated there is “something un-Reaganesque about trying to plaster his name all over the country the way Lenin was plastered over Eastern Europe, Mao over China and Saddam Hussein all over Iraq. It’s time for us to rescue Ronald Reagan and his legacy from his more zealous friends.”[22](#) Albeit being quite intense of a statement, it does provide historians with another reminder that more action is required throughout the academic community to prevent history from being twisted and reshaped for the worst.

Longley perfectly summarizes what I truly believe to be the reason as to why the RRLP was created. He states that the project is simply a push from conservatives to memorialize Reagan by acting like they are the “the guardians of his legacy.” In addition, he states that those on the far-right all too often succeed because:

Conservatives understand the symbolic value of Reagan in winning the struggle for the hearts and minds of Middle America as well as shoring up their standing among the Republican base. Conservatives want to convince Americans that Reagan was a hero and that, since he represents their values, they should have political power.[23](#)

Longley’s effort is indeed noble and a great contribution to the academic community. But, it must be remembered that the “War on Reagan” exists more in public discourse and national media than it does in the academic world. Therefore, similar efforts by historians to correct inaccurately written Reagan histories must be aimed more towards public audiences instead of academic audiences. Writers of history that curve their historical narratives (regardless of what topic or person is being examined) must be held accountable for their historically misleading, inaccurate, and outright propaganda pieces created to misinform their audience into believing in a history based on truthiness rather than truth.

This historiographical study of how Ronald Reagan's legacy has been warped into unheralded proportions provides us with a perfect example that well-written and fact-based history can and has been used against historians by conservative propagandists.

It is true that campaigns and efforts across the academic community for historical truth and believability must continue. But, by continually over-analyzing the same era of history over and over again (such as WWII, the New Deal, and Civil War), historians can lose sight of the fact while they are still making great contributions to the academic community, the largest community the American public is being systematically hypnotized into believing in lies, mythology, and false history.

In conclusion, I will borrow some quotes from the 2005 movie *Back to the Future*. If mythological propaganda-laced history continues like a plague to spread across the country, "the consequences could be disastrous." It is the responsibility of past, present, and future historians and scholarly professionals to stop the plague from spreading. Indeed, "the future depends on it."

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Footnotes:

- ¹Paul Kengor, "Reagan Among the Professors," *Policy Review* 98, (1999): 27.
- ²Kengor, 18.
- ³Kengor, 17-18.
- ⁴Doug Rossinow, "Talking Points Memo," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (1999): 1287.
- ⁵Rossinow, 1287.
- ⁶Rossinow, 1288.
- ⁷Matthew Dallek, "Not Ready for Mt. Rushmore: Reconciling the Myth of Ronald Reagan with the Reality." *American Scholar* 78, no. 3 (2009): 2-3. Also available online at: <http://theamericanscholar.org/not-ready-for-mt-rushmore>.
- ⁸Charles L. Ponce de Leon, "The New Historiography of the 1980s," *Reviews in American History* 35, no. 2 (2008): 303.
- ⁹Hugh Helco, "The Mixed Legacies of Ronald Reagan," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2008): 556-557.
- ¹⁰Charles P. Pierce, *Idiot American: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 8.
- ¹¹Pierce, 51.
- ¹²Al Gore, *The Assault on Reason* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 253.
- ¹³Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 45-46.
- ¹⁴William Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: The Right-Wing Distortion of the Reagan Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).
- ¹⁵Bunch, 66-67.
- ¹⁶Bunch, 59.
- ¹⁷Barry Friedman, *The Will of the People: How Public Opinion Has Influenced the Supreme Court and Shaped the Meaning of the Constitution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009): 306-307.
- ¹⁸Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *The Supreme Court and the Constitution: Readings in American Constitutional History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998): 655.
- ¹⁹Peter Schweizer and Paul Kengor, ed., *The Reagan Presidency: Assessing the Man and His Legacy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005): 17.

²⁰Kyle Longley et al., *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007). xv.

²¹The Ronald Reagan Legacy Project: Honoring the 20th Century's Greatest President with a Memorial in Every County in America, Accessed November 19, 2012, <http://www.ronaldreaganlegacyproject.org>.

²²George Will, "Tending Reagan's Legacy: Supporters Aim to Have Memorials All Over the Country," Quoted in Peter Slevin, *Washington Post*, June 17, 2001.

²³Longley, xiii.

Ronald Reagan, Inaugural Address, 1985. "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?" Ronald Reagan, 1984 State of the Union. "It is my fervent goal and hope that we will some day no longer have to rely on nuclear weapons to deter aggression and assure world peace. To that end the United States is now engaged in a serious and sustained effort to negotiate major reductions in levels of offensive nuclear weapons with the ul On October 14, 1982, President Ronald Reagan declared a "war on drugs," doubling-down on an initiative that was started by Richard Nixon. Reagan declared that illicit drugs were a direct threat to U.S. national security and through a series of legislation, like the mandatory minimum sentencing laws of 1986, made a hard right turn away from a public health approach to drug use. Drug offenders faced lifetime consequences for minor infractions, yet the focus on tough sentences for crack and not powder cocaine meant the people going to prison were largely black and brown. The media seemed to play

In recent weeks there has been much commentary about the "War on Christmas." FOX News host Bill O'Reilly recently spoke up on November 18 saying, "It's all part of the secular progressive agenda to get Christianity and spirituality and Judaism out of the public square." He then added, "because if you look at what happened in Western Europe and Canada, if you can get religion out, then you can pass secular progressive programs, like legalization of narcotics, euthanasia, abortion at will, gay marriage, because the objection to those things is religious-based, usually." He believed Christmas was a special time that had grown too secular; the president about which I write is Ronald Reagan.