

RONALD REAGAN: THE REAL LEGACY

REFLECTIONS BY ACTIVISTS, ARTISTS, LEADERS AND SCHOLARS IN THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

compiled by *Queers for Economic Justice*

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“When I learned that President Reagan was re-elected to second term, I sat down in the middle of the subway platform and cried. My despair was momentary, eventually turning into organizing and activism. But the world community is still paying dearly for the destructive policies of his presidency.

His administration laid the groundwork for ketchup sandwiches, the dismantling of labor unions, funneling arms for hostages and the invasion of Grenada. His press secretary publicly laughed at AIDS related questions. And by flagrantly dismissing the disease and those dying from it, Reagan allowed AIDS to decimate families, communities and countries.

It’s sad when someone dies. But rewriting history in order to airbrush Reagan’s divisive legacy is just as reprehensible as his policies. And, the legacy continues... Reagan with a smile, Bush with a smirk.”

- **Katherine Acey**, New York
Executive Director of the Astraea Foundation



“Ronald Reagan, at his second inaugural in 1984, had the gall to say that ‘Peace is our highest aspiration. And our record is clear. Americans resort to force only when they must. We have never been aggressors.’ At the very least this was an insult to the suffering of 100,000s of people the world over. Let alone the imperialist, interventionist, and racist history of the United States from its very origins, his own 8 years in office saw 100,000s of people killed in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Grenada, Guatemala, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, and around the world as a direct result of his and his Administration's policies and agendas.

His ‘legacy’, the Reagan Doctrine, for the vast majority of the world's citizens resulted in war, hunger, poverty, sickness, and human right violations, of arms races and the slashing of social spending and increasing inequalities. Its devastating impact is still being felt today, with even more force under his real political successor, George W. Bush.”

- **Nikhil Aziz**, Massachusetts
Director of Research, Political Research Associates



“It is my contention that there are tens of thousands of U.S. citizens who would still be alive today if it weren’t for the proactive (in)action of the Reagan administration’s urban and AIDS policies. As our country spent about a week memorializing and repackaging a man who lived a long life, let’s spend a moment remembering those who needlessly died too young. And for those of us who made it, let’s commit ourselves to making sure it never happens again.”

- **Dr, Juan Battle**, New York
Associate Professor of Sociology, Hunter College
Co-author of “Say It Loud: I’m Black and I’m Proud”



“It is impossible, in this space, to list all of the monstrous things that this man did. What stands out for me most vividly is the way that he altered public discourse about poverty in this country. Reagan ushered in an era of mean-spiritedness that continues to shape our public policies and social values. This is a man who threw thousands of disabled people on to the streets. This is a man who gave huge tax breaks to his rich friends while simultaneously blaming poor people for their own poverty. His deficit-causing, supply-side, “trickle-down” tax cuts were sold to the public with bullshit math. Together with a tremendous boost in military spending, Reagan’s tax cuts were designed to make the government destitute - - necessitating cuts in government spending and thereby justifying the dismantling of social programs.

As a result, we saw the complete demonization of the poor. Reagan’s COMPLETELY FICTIONAL creation of the “Welfare Queen” (lazy, single black women who were dependent on welfare for years, having more babies to collect easy money and get rich) was sold to the public as if it were true. It is a lie that has remained embedded in the public conscience, making it impossible in the last twenty years to get the government to help those in need. Reagan made selfishness and apathy seem normal.

Before Reagan, any candidate running for President would have had to address poverty issues in his campaign. As we will witness in the final months leading up to this November’s election, Reagan’s legacy is that the plight of poor in this country no longer warrants discussion by our (Republican or Democratic) candidates or elected officials, except for scapegoating. Millions of children live in poverty in this country, and in our present climate our leaders have no obligation to care about them. Thanks to Mr. Reagan.

I was raised Catholic and taught to believe in hell. I don’t know if it exists, but I have absolutely no doubt that if it does exist, Ronald Reagan is there now.”

- **Joseph N. DeFilippis**, New York
Coordinator, Queers for Economic Justice

former Director, SAGE/Queens



“During Reagan's first term, I was working for an advocacy organization that campaigned for publicly-funded day care for the poor and for near-poor working families. Reagan's tax and budget cuts were working their way down the line to state and local governments, and the day care community in New York State, as it called itself, had to work its ass off not to lose the little it had. As I watched the Reagan presidency unfold I can remember thinking, *'he is trying to completely undo the social and economic justice programs of the 1960s.'*

As the 1980s faded into the 1990s and the conservative Republican ascendancy lengthened (yes, even during the Clinton Presidency, the conservatives extended their power), I thought, *'oh, no. It's not just the 1960s. They want to repeal the New Deal of the 1930s as well.'*

Then, Bush the Second arrived, trumpeting more tax cuts in the name of Reagan and I realized, *'oh my God! It is much worse than I thought. The conservative ideologues who run the Republican Party and now run the country actually want to starve to death all government functions that are not about defense, law enforcement, and national security. Even public education is at risk!'*

Ronald Reagan's presidency ushered in the most conservative era in the history of the United States. The current moment, which we owe to Reagan's leadership, is worse than the Gilded Age of robber barons of the late 19th century. Reagan made greed and complacency acceptable as the dominant values in American life. He made us believe we are so overtaxed (this is not true!) that even liberal Democrats can't ask for higher taxes. The gulf between the rich and the rest of us is so great that to claim we live in a democracy stretches the truth.

It will take at least a generation to undo the damage he and his political descendants have done to my country (and I haven't even discussed the rest of the world). I'm 55 years old. My greatest wish is to live long enough to see him and everything he stood for thoroughly repudiated.”

- **Dr. John D'Emilio**, Illinois
Professor of History and Director of the Gender and Women's Studies program at the University of Illinois at Chicago.
Author of numerous books, most recently, of “Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin”



"Thanks to the powers that be, you've heard over and over again this past week that Ronald Reagan was a man of enormous compassion, grace and kindness.

Go tell it to the many thousands dead from AIDS because Reagan wouldn't lift a finger to foster research or to combat the mounting epidemic in any way whatsoever. Mr. Compassion couldn't even say the AIDS word. And he's on public record, when Governor of California, as saying that he viewed homosexuality as an affliction and a disorder.

Go tell it to the thousands tortured, mutilated and dead as a result of his support for the contras in Nicaragua.

Go tell it to the minorities in our own country, and in particular to African-Americans, whose civil liberties he did so little to protect, let alone expand.

You needn't tell it to the world's corporate heads, generals and dictators. They felt in full Ronald Reagan's beneficence.

Historical truth matters. As a nation we care little for it, much preferring simplistic distortions that sustain our national myths about 'freedom' 'opportunity' and 'democracy'. You can't grow into adulthood when you're fed pabulum all your life. And that's why we remain a nation of adolescents, with a culture concerned far more with celebrityhood than with ameliorating suffering. "

- **Dr. Martin Duberman**, New York
Distinguished Professor of History at the City University of NY
Author of 20 books including "Stonewall" and "Left Out"
Board of Directors, Queers for Economic Justice



"Ronald Reagan ushered in the culture of cruelty. This sensibility has always been present in American life, but it became the dominant social tendency under his grinning reign.

The culture of cruelty is more than just a rabid pursuit of self-interest. It's also a strategy for enjoying the pain of others. In this version of social sadism, the haves are invited to take pleasure in the pain of the homeless, the impoverished, the stigmatized, and the infirm. The suffering of these victim classes becomes a spectacle that evokes not empathy but righteous indignation and demands for further retribution that will prolong the sadomasochistic cycle. Reagan put a smiley face on this human sacrifice, thereby enabling privileged Americans to avoid confronting the schadenfreude that their dominance produced.

The culture of cruelty Reagan spawned is with us still. It's fully embodied by George W. Bush, but also manifest in everything from the worship of ruthlessness (as in the icon of Donald Trump) to the triumph of male violence at Abu Ghraib and, for that matter, in gangsta rap. Ron's

great gift was that he made it all seem homespun, even kindly. Now that he's gone, may we be better able to see the snarl behind the American smile.”

- **Richard Goldstein**, New York
Executive Editor, the Village Voice
author of several books, including “The Attack Queers: Liberal Society and the Gay Right”



"Last week, the nation plunged itself gratefully into the comfortable business of mourning a dead president. Ignoring for a moment the bleak body counts in Iraq and the confusing photographs of our brave military men and women forcing Iraqi prisoners into sexually humiliating positions, and turning away from the sickening prospect of summer blockbusters like Sponge Bob Squarepants: The Movie, the American public clung to the memory of a kinder and gentler dictatorship.

Longing now for the time of Voodoo economics, cowboy politics and the Moral Majority, good Americans everywhere remembered a brave man who refused to fund AIDS research, sent arms secretly to Iran in exchange for hostages and supported the brutal Contras in Nicaragua. As usual American memories are short when it comes to US terrorism and long when so-called "freedom" and "democracy" need to be imported to some recalcitrant socialist nation. With a thrilling election on the horizon, where voters will choose between two over-privileged, wooden and uninspired white guys, Reagan probably does look good to many people. Just remember that compared to Bush Jr, Sponge Bob Squarepants himself would seem positively presidential."

- **Dr. Judith Halberstam**, California
Associate Professor of Literature, University of California, San Diego
film critic, Girlfriends magazine
author of the book "Female masculinity"



“I was ten when Reagan became president in 1981. I grew up thinking ‘Reaganomics’ was an actual word. Of course the mainstream media will never print that Ronald Reagan was racist, anti-poor, war-mongering, bureaucrat that did an excellent job for his Wall Street bosses. From actor, to governor, to two-term president, Reagan ratted out his fellow Screen Actor’s Guild members to Un-American Committee and broke the PATCO air- traffickers strike. He bombed Libya, invaded Grenada, and armed the death squads in Nicaragua and El Salvador. He demonized women of color on welfare. Vilified people with AIDS. He sanctioned police terror against communities of color and waged a war against the Black Panthers.

At the same time, the largest anti-war march since the Vietnam era took place, within first months of Reagan's presidency. On May 3, 1981, The People's Anti-war Movement (PAM), led by Latino, Black and trade unionist forces, organized 100,000 people for a march on the Pentagon against the war in El Salvador. 20,000 more marched on the West Coast. This was the first time in the history of US anti-war movement that speakers from The American Indian Movement (AIM), the Palestinian and the lesbian, gay, bi, and trans movement were included on a rally program. Under a reactionary, right-wing political climate groups like SALSA SOUL Sisters and Dykes Against Racism Everywhere (DARE), helped bring out hundreds for the first, LGBT anti-war contingent. This is the proud and continued history of the lesbian, gay, bi, and trans movement. This is the same spirit solidarity and fight-back against racism, war and LGBT oppression that we can bring with us to protest this summer to both the Democratic and Republican Conventions"

- **Imani Henry**, New York
the International Action Center



“Ronald Reagan was perhaps the most successful right wing performance artist and it annoys me no end to hear him described as an actor. Yes, he had traditional acting skills, but then performance art is a medium that borrows from many other forms including b grade movies, national politics, etc to create a hybrid form which often calls into question the very definition of art. Reagan was hardly the first performance art to insist he wasn't ‘acting’ to blur the boundaries between art and life with great success - I think he owes a lot to Linda Montano. Also to artists such as Mike Smith and the late Spalding Gray who perform characters based on autobiographical material with such finesse that the audience believes they are not seeing a performance, which is to say something constructed, scripted, planned, but rather experiencing a real intimacy with the artist. Reagan is so postmodern that he calls into question the notions such as ‘authenticity’.

Reagan of course used his theatrically derived skills - in particular his comic gifts - to entertain the country while enacting policies that screwed over most of his most ardent fans. The persona he created and performed has outlived him. Perhaps that is his greatest achievement, that even after Reagonomics have been discredited, they are hardly discussed, even in more progressive outlets like NPR. Instead we get more standing ovations for the ongoing performance piece.”

- **Holly Hughes**, Michigan
Associate Professor of Art, University of Michigan
Renowned Performance Artist



“Question:
What is Reagan's legacy?”

Answer:
Welfare deform, breaking union actions, helping to Disneyfy politics, mass deaths and building the foundation for empire-building through covert and overt war and denial (Central America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, AIDS, criminalization of all non-white, non-‘straight’, non-wealthy people, etc.), gutting public infrastructure (through defunding health care, schools, mass transit systems, etc.), making transparent that American ‘democracy’ is an illusion that's selective in application (and that Presidents can and do ‘break the law’ and get away with it), and so much more.

What this means to US-based LGBTST people in 2004:
The peoples' answer since (and before) Reagan has been to use our rage to fight back and build community for justice. In 2004, this means going beyond the lavender bubble to build mass-based movements that use all of our creativity to show the world that the peoples' movement in this country says no to Bush, no to war, no to empire-building, and no to lying about dead presidents.”

- **Joo-Hyun Kang**, New York
former Executive Director, Audre Lorde Project



“My initial sadness for the family of former President Reagan on hearing of his death morphed into a slow-burn of resentment and as the media and much of the nation proceeded to top each other day by day in lionizing the man and his Presidency. Surely I understand the instinct to shadow the most glaring faults of the recently deceased, but to wax glowingly about the Reagan years with no mention of the damage, ignorance and hopelessness spawned by so many of his policies and omissions is a shameful rewrite of history.

From his disappearing act on AIDS and HIV to his deriding those in poverty, to his cruel ‘limited government’ ideology, he has indeed left a lasting legacy. I pass his legacy every day sleeping in doorways and asking for change. I visit his legacy in a quiet grove built in memory of so many who should still be here. We all pay for his legacy every day in taxes that fund prisons instead of schools, and in an imperialism that continues unbounded.

Reagan did indeed leave a lasting mark. Perhaps someday this nation will recover.”

- **Kate Kendell**, California
Executive Director, National Center for Lesbian Rights



“It’s important to honor those who have passed on and show respect towards those who are in mourning. And at the same time we should put things in context and document the legacy left behind by former President Ronald Reagan. As the US mourns the loss of Reagan and, in the process, reviews his record, it is extremely important that we remember the truth about the Reagan Administration's policies and the devastating long lasting effects those divisive policies have had.

The reality is that Reagan further disenfranchised the most vulnerable and marginalized people. His tax cuts for the wealthiest class had a devastating effect on poor and working-class people. More than 30,000 people died from AIDS-related complications while Reagan completely ignored the epidemic. He tripled the national deficit. He refused to support sanctions against apartheid South Africa. As governor of California, Reagan accelerated a process of shutting down state mental hospitals, sending a cascade of mentally ill patients into the streets. Reagan's famous quote is ‘Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,’ but he did nothing to tear down the walls of poverty and violence that affect so many communities around the nation.”

- **Surina Khan**, California
activist & writer
former Executive Director, the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights
Commission



“Watching my mother, a strong woman, reduced to tears as a result of the PR machine surrounding Reagan’s death, reminded me of Reagan’s actual Presidency. He and his people did really horrible things, but managed to distract you from it by being charming. Watching the event of his death reminded me of all of the stuff that was stolen from the people during his presidency, only now what they’re stealing from us are our emotions. What we felt during his presidency (anger, fear, dread) does not match what they are now telling us we felt then.

Reagan was the beginning of a new dark age. A dark age of greed and genocide and all of those words we pretend to understand but which actually came in a nice, neat PR package. Reagan’s legacy is that we (America, the queer community, everyone) have been pushed so far to the Right, that we don’t even realize how Right we are. The queer community has unconsciously bought into the values of the Right so much that it has shaped our responses to the most basic parts of our lives. Our response to protecting our families was to get married. Our response to globalization was to become better gentrifiers. Our response to AIDS was to become moral watchdogs of gay men’s sexuality.

The first dark age lasted 1,000 years, but there was some light. With the death of Reagan comes an opportunity to let a little light into the dark age that he ushered in. Now is the time to reject his legacy, and return to an agenda of LIBERATION. I don’t want to get married. I don’t want

someone else's land. I don't want to reject sexual outlaws. I want to embrace them. It is time to resume liberation."

- **Michael Marinez**, Texas
Board of Directors, Esperanza Peace & Justice Center
Artist



"Ronald Reagan's presidency was a disaster for this country, and we continue to live with the shattering consequences every day, and will for a very long time.

It's almost hard to remember, but there was a time when the radical right wing was not in power in the United States. The election of Ronald Reagan changed all that.

As a puppet of his ultra-conservative (ex-John Birchers, many of them) financiers, Reagan hired Pat Buchanan and Gary Bauer in the White House, put Antonin Scalia on the U.S. Supreme Court (and just missed adding Robert Bork), made Ed Meese Attorney General, destroyed social programs, made government help a negative concept, promoted civil war in Central America, invaded Grenada for no reason and, oh yes, ignored a deadly plague sweeping the nation and the world.

But the overriding catastrophe of Ronald Reagan is his empowerment and legitimization of the radical right. Ugly, dangerous, hypocritical conservatives now rule our country and I fear there is no end in sight."

- **Ann Northrop**, New York
journalist
activist



"Ronald Reagan's death in early June prompted an orgy of pro-Reagan propaganda from the supposedly 'liberal' US news media, which indulged in sentimentalized retrospectives of his life and times that were both inaccurate and incomplete. Nowhere was this truer than on Reagan's foreign policy record.

Perhaps the most frequently played news clip during 'Reagan week' was the excerpt from Reagan's June 1987 speech at the Brandenburg Gate, with Reagan shouting, 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!' The notion that Reagan's speech brought down the Berlin Wall is pure fiction. Crediting Reagan not only ignores Mikhail Gorbachev's central role but also trivializes the work of ordinary East Europeans in bringing about their own liberation from decades of

Communist oppression. In 1989, ordinary East Germans who courageously took to the streets to demand real democracy from the German Democratic Republic (GDR); at the same time, the reform Communist government in Hungary opened the border with Austria so that East Germans could cross into West Germany, which they did in large numbers. Gorbachev forbade Erich Honecker from opening fire on the East German people in order to preserve the faltering regime and ruled out Soviet intervention, making inevitable the collapse of the oppressive and sclerotic GDR regime. Equally fictitious are the grandiose claims that Reagan 'brought down Soviet Communism' and 'ended the Cold War.' The truth is that the Soviet Union constituted a corrupt and inefficient authoritarian regime that simply could no longer be sustained. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he unleashed centrifugal forces that he could not control, leading to the unraveling of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself in 1991. Reagan just had the 'luck of the Irish' (as he would call it) of being in office when the collapse of the Soviet empire began.

The true legacy of Reagan's anti-Communist foreign policy can be found in Latin America, Africa and Asia, where the US pursued a retrograde and ineffective policy of anti-Communist 'rollback.' The Reagan administration funneled funds to right-wing death squads that tortured and murdered tens of thousands throughout Central America. Some of that funding contravened US law, but despite the revelations of the Iran-Contra affair, no Reagan administration official ever served time for his illegal activities. Perhaps Reagan's most abiding foreign policy legacy is the genocide of the indigenous Maya of Guatemala under Gen. Efraim Rios Montt.

How will I remember Ronald Reagan? As a genocidaire responsible for human rights atrocities on a vast scale. Reagan was the smiley face on mass murder. None of the innocent men, women, and children murdered by Reagan's cronies will ever have a state funeral that Reagan himself enjoyed (at US taxpayers' expense). Their bones cry out for justice. If we cannot offer them justice, then at the very least, we owe them an accurate account of history.”

- **Dr. Pauline Park**, New York



“Remembering the King of the (Evil) Empire

Though Ronald Reagan is finally moldering in the ground, the painful results of his presidency do not decay with him. I bring no honor to his passing. While those who lined up to touch his coffin may have short memories that allow them to enjoy rightwing mythology, I cannot forget his deeds. The list is long, but I remember him most for two things that stand out even above his refusal to talk about AIDS, his support of ruthless regimes in other countries, his attack on labor unions, his disregard for environmental sustainability, his courtship of the rich, etc.

The two things that have such destructive effect in the moment lie behind these other policies: his providing a voice and a home for the growth of a vigorous rightwing agenda and his beginning the anti-taxation movement that we still suffer from today.

Today's problems are his strongest legacy: the elimination of human services, deregulation, outsourcing and downsizing, an unimaginable deficit, bankrupt state governments, inadequate government funding for schools and libraries and public institutions, privatization of public institutions, reduction of legal services and labor unions, racialization of social issues, worldwide AIDS pandemic, and the widest gap between the rich and the poor since the robber barons. The 21st century USA was greatly shaped by a smiling cowboy—and we must remember that a smiling cowboy is still at the rein. We must seize the future for equality and justice.”

- **Suzanne Pharr**, Tennessee
former Director of the Highlander Center
author of *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*
activist



“When I was a child in the 1960s, my family used the welfare system in the way that most folks used the welfare system: we needed significant short term help to get from struggle to strength. This public system was, compared to today, accessible and multilayered. Reagan came into power, took one look at the public welfare system, and began the process of privatization. With a few pen strokes, he turned a public right into a competitive contract system.

Coining the term ‘welfare queen’, Reagan used a mixture of racism and public exhaustion with working so hard for so little to create the myth of the single mother birthing one baby after another just to get public dollars. Welfare, said Reagan, paid for people to just sit on their asses. It paid, he said, for criminals. It was not a right but a way to keep people down. And by continuing the system that allowed this to happen, he said, government failed.

Reagan managed to take the disillusion with the public system that had grown rampant after Nixon and turn it into a disillusion with government's role in public services. He managed to do this while reinvigorating the notion of ‘America’, now neatly separated from any kind of responsibility for the whole of its citizenry.

It was now, thanks to Reagan, the job of private nonprofits to apply for public funds to do the work of guaranteeing basic rights to the US public. Twenty years later, these private nonprofits have become government temp agencies. The responsibility for providing food shelves, affordable housing, economic aid, all forms of health support, early intervention for children in poverty, and the list goes on rests, for the most part, on the work of private nonprofits - at least until faith based organizations take over. These nonprofits face public cuts and program rearrangements on a daily basis, facing the same profound job insecurity that the majority of the US public also faces. This insecurity affects these organizations' ability to provide the services that this same US public needs. And then when they fail - as many are now doing - further justification is made for the need for a more traditional charity model.

Sitting here in 2004, I never would have believed that I would so desperately miss a system that, in 1984, was flawed yet was far preferable to what we have today. Thank you, Ronald Reagan.”

- **Susan Raffo**, Minneapolis
editor, “Queerly Classed”, South End Press
author, “Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability”
activist



“It’s not just the Right; I too am very nostalgic about the Reagan years. As an immigrant who arrived in the US in 1980, the ‘America’ I came to know, the America of my first 12 years in this country was the America that Ronald Reagan and George I Bush’s policies defined. I never experienced the US in the Civil Rights or Vietnam eras, or certain moments of the Women’s Movement. Mine was an America in which I would wake up to the invasion of Grenada – my grandfather’s homeland – on my television screen, ride the subway home from class that day wondering why the outrage I felt was not seared into the faces and conversations and action of everyone on the train. It was an America that helped kill dreams of social democracy in a Caribbean I came here fully intending to return to, not to mention the thousands in the circum-Caribbean region that US funds and policies killed in the 1980s.

But I miss the Reagan years terribly. They were a crucible for activism, years when much of modern LBGT people of color organizing and culture first took shape, when AIDS shaped Gay activism, when anti-apartheid solidarity was a common and clear political denominator for Black folks, when immigration began to genuinely globalize the culture and consciousness of New York’s Black communities in exciting ways, a period of an immigration amnesty that conservatives forget Reagan signed into law. I look back fondly on the exciting Reagan years, when I first cut my teeth at activism, when protest seemed normative and everywhere, everything seemed political at my age. Without the net, we met in person. I am sure there is considerable romanticism in this; after all, the blank faces I remember on the train that October 25th in 1983 were plodding their way to and from work disconnected from any place called St. Georges. But it does seem like there’s nothing quite like the energy of that period right now; for me, as a 40-something 1980s immigrant, those were my ‘sixties’. The access we had during the Clinton interregnum, and the wholesale silencing of dissent (by government, media and the body politic) that has been the national response to 9/11 sure make me miss Ronnie.

By the way, are they still burying him, or can I turn my TV back on now?”

- **Colin Robinson**, New York
Director, New York State Black Gay Network
founding member, Audre Lorde Project, Gay Men of African Descent, the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and other organizations



“Those of us who were out and involved in queer community life during the 1980s, watched as our friends and lovers dropped dead around us while America looked the other way. Reagan’s disgraceful and willful failure to speak out on AIDS and take action for those seven years mirrored much of the nation’s failure to acknowledge the terror visited on our communities. As our small and under-resourced communities struggled to educate the public, initiate the first prevention campaigns, care for our friends, and bury our dead, Reagan said nothing and did nothing. His medical and health leaders did nothing. His budget directors, attorney generals, and legal experts did nothing. While gay men wiped drool and shit off our lovers, read mounting obituaries in gay papers, and funneled into the ranks of volunteer caregiver organizations, mainstream America marched forward to the Reagan priorities of making money, protecting privilege, and creating a culture of greed.

Remember, it was the Reagan administration that had as it's initial goal the elimination of the US Department of Education and the removal of the Secretary of Education from the Cabinet. When Reagan could not succeed in achieving these goals, his administration put forward many of the myths that we still struggle with in public education today, such as ‘schools are adequately funded in America today’, and lack of student achievement is ‘due to families and communities, not teachers and schools’, and ‘the teacher unions are only in business for themselves, not for the children.’

While many people have commented upon Reagan's legacy in terms of the HIV epidemic, widespread suffering in Latin America, and the tremendous deficit created during his reign, few have commented on the terrible ways his policies on mental health have affected our nation. In California, this legacy is especially apparent because we experienced both his neglect as a governor and then his decimation of funding for mental health services, addiction treatment, and emergency/transitional housing as president. Many of the homeless people suffering from mental health and addiction challenges on the streets today are there because of the policy shifts that occurred under Reagan, where the nation moved away from feeling any responsibility to care for this vulnerable population. The irony of Reagan's own struggle with Alzheimer's, albeit with plenty of financial support to ease the struggle, should not be lost on anyone.”

- **Dr. Eric Rofes**, California

Assistant Professor in Education at Humboldt State University in Northern California
author of numerous books, including “Reviving the Tribe: Regenerating Gay Men's
Sexuality and Culture in the Ongoing Epidemic.”

former Executive Director, the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services
Center



“The man that has been on TV all week bears no relationship to the president that I know. I knew the president that ignored the AIDS crisis that has now reached pandemic proportions. The Reagan I knew broke the unions. The Reagan I knew ignored all of black people’s concerns.”

- **Regina Shavers**, New York
Executive Director of GRIOT Circle
former co-chair, DC37's Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee,
former Assistant Director, the NYC Department of Health's HIV Training Institute



“The sham of Ronald Reagan’s beatification and coronation disguised as funeral is testimony to the American media’s colossal lack of spine and to the Republican party’s shameful appropriation of Reagan’s death for political purposes in an election year.

I am enraged and I am heartbroken. Lost to the Reagan hypocrites are the lives of the young and beautiful gay men and people of color I saw die horrible deaths of AIDS complications after months of sweats and wasting and vomiting and shitting and dragging themselves on walkers down Castro street in San Francisco looking like the living dead of concentration camp horror. Lost in the telling are the dirt streaked and famished faces of the children in poor urban and rural America whom Reagan willfully and cruelly deprived of education, health benefits and welfare. Lost are the thousands upon thousands of Nicaraguans who sacrificed all they had for the right to be literate and the right to health care and the right to clean running water and electricity that Reagan destroyed with an illegal war against the democratically elected government of Nicaragua financed by the covert sale of arms to Iran.

The ‘Great Communicator’ was a liar. He cared nothing for average Americans and even less for children. He didn’t give a damn about people living on the margins. He was phony to his core, the Gipper on the silver screen, the grim reaper in real life.

The real legacy of Reagan is the memory I have of two police officers patrolling the Mission district in San Francisco the day after his election. They stopped two Chicano teenage boys for loitering on Valencia Street. When the young men protested that they had a right to be on the street, the officers violently jabbed them with their nightsticks. They laughed and said: ‘Shove your civil rights, fuckers. Reagan’s in the White House now’. The torture of Iraqi prisoners is not an aberration of American policy and values as exemplified by both Reagan and Bush. It is the fulfillment of the Reagan-Bush legacy, a legacy written with the blood of children, of the poor, of gay men and people of color. I hated the man. There was nothing to love.”

- **Carmen Vazquez**, New York
nationally recognized activist



“Juan Rodriguez, Jeff Leibowitz, Essex Hemphill, Brian Dionne, Don Boyle, Joe Franco, Donald Woods, Joseph Beam, David Kirshenbaum, Assotto Saint, Mark Russell, Steven Genden, Robert Scarselli, Vito Russo, Miguel Acevedo, Joe Walsh.

These are some of the men close to me who might have been alive if Ronald Reagan had done something about HIV/AIDS in 1983.”

- **Robert Vázquez-Pacheco**, New York
Program Manager, Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues