

## What Reagan Taught Bush

The top 10 lessons for counterrevolutionaries.

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Anyone old enough to remember the Reagan presidency is in shock. The right, because their hero has died; the left, because the eulogizing is so gloriously twisted and exaggerated it brings to mind Reagan himself, who never let the facts get in the way of a good story. If you missed the Reagan administration and need a crash course, here are the lessons that the Republicans learned from the Reagan presidency and have passed on to George W. Bush and America's current rulers.

**10. Even if tax cuts build a weaker America they build a stronger Republican party:** As economist Lester Thurow has written, "the epitaph of the Reagan presidency will be: When Ronald Reagan became President, the United States was the largest creditor nation. When he left the presidency, we were the world's largest debtor nation." Under cover of his "supply-side" theory, he massively expanded the federal budget deficit and our trade deficit, both of which were harmful in the long run but allowed the Republicans to juice the economy with debt-financed stimulus and win re-election for Reagan. The Republican fable that Reagan returned America to economic strength after the failure of the Carter administration is not borne out by fact. Reagan continued Carter's regulatory reform policies, and only in the final year of his presidency (1988) did employment return to what it had been in 1979. There is no evidence that Reagan's "tax cuts" had any significant economic impact, since they were really a shift in the tax burden from the wealthy to the middle class. The long-term effect of the Republican drive to reduce the tax burden on the wealthy is profound. If U.S. taxes were equivalent to those of our European allies, the Social Security Trust Fund would be solvent and sufficient funds would exist to virtually eliminate poverty and provide significant investment in public education -- so when you see substandard housing and underfunded public schools, think of Ronald Reagan.

**9. A President must take full responsibility for everything except mistakes and illegal activities:** Reagan's campaign manager, William Casey, negotiated the sale of weapons to Iran to secure the release of America's hostages held there, a direct violation of U.S. law and policy. Once in office as Reagan's CIA director, he illegally oversaw the transfer of funds to right-wing counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua. The official response to the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib is eerily similar to the story created to defend the Reagan administration's cover-up of Iran-Contra: that it was the work of a few rogue employees who were operating at the highest levels of the U.S. government. The Reagan

Administration's official cover story was that an employee (Oliver North) in the White House's National Security Council brokered the illegal sale of weapons to America's enemies and used the money to finance right-wing paramilitary groups in Nicaragua and El Salvador. In reality, nothing like this was possible without the tacit cooperation of the CIA, NSA, and the rest of the military establishment, but the thin veneer of plausibility enabled the administration to deflect blame from the leaders, who escaped prosecution for their crimes. In addition to Reagan, whose knowledge of the activities of his own government was sketchy at best, George H. W. Bush also claimed to have been "out of the loop" despite the preponderance of evidence to the contrary. The debate over culpability often glides right past the question of what we were doing training and equipping forces widely cited by international human rights organizations as being barbaric and inhumane. Because they called themselves anti-communist, the Reagan administration welcomed them as allies and refused to permit their crimes to be investigated -- just as today we accept profoundly anti-democratic regimes in Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia because they are willing to help us plunder Afghanistan and Iraq.

**8. While overt racism is unseemly, a Republican leader should signal to white-power proponents that he agrees with them:** Reagan pioneered insulting the poor and powerless and proved how popular this is with white men. Launching his candidacy for the presidency in the deep south where white civil-rights workers had been murdered, he invoked "states' rights," language that substituted for the discredited claims of Caucasian racial supremacy as the racist's rallying cry. Reagan's characterization of black women on public assistance as "welfare queens" enabled white people to openly loathe them again, behavior that, during the height of the civil-rights movement, had been considered rude and boorish. Had Reagan genuinely cared about misappropriation of public funds, he would not have been indifferent to corporate crimes that looted more money from both public and private coffers than all of the black women in American history (including Oprah Winfrey) have ever seen. The blindness of Reagan's Justice Department permitted new forms of corporate fraud to be pioneered such as junk bonds that stole billions from investors and the misuse of savings and loan charters, creating a scandal that drained billions from the public treasury. Neither of these massive rip-offs attracted Reagan's attention because their perpetrators and the beneficiaries of these crimes were almost entirely male Caucasians.

**7. Nations that assist the United States in its foreign policy goals can murder, torture, and imprison anyone necessary to maintain stability:** Reagan's ambassador to Honduras John Negroponte, now in charge of the reconstruction of Iraq, gave American moral and financial support to Roberto d'Aubuisson and his ARENA Party in El Salvador, a barely veiled political arm of the death squads that terrorized the country in the name of democracy and freedom. Reagan also remained silent on the great crusade against apartheid in South Africa, which he considered a matter for the South African military to manage by itself with assistance from American arms dealers.

**6. Bust unions whenever you can, because those people are a danger to the continued concentration of wealth and power in the hands of trust-fund Republicans.** Among Reagan's first acts in office was the crushing of the air traffic controllers union. Reagan refused to negotiate and ordered the hiring of more compliant workers. When Libyan agents brought down an American passenger plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, he diverted attention from the lack of security in the international airline system instead unsuccessfully dispatching warplanes to kill Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

**5. The most effective way to please corporate contributors is to appoint regulatory chiefs who will undermine their agencies**

