

RONALD REAGAN

*How an Ordinary Man Became
an Extraordinary Leader*

Dinesh D'Souza

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*For my grandparents,
Joe and Irene D'Souza*

*What can the young give back,
But love and gratitude*

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

Prologue: *The Wise Men and the Dummy* 1

1. *Why Reagan Gets No Respect* 7
2. *The Education of an Actor* 33
3. *Mr. Reagan Goes to Washington* 57
4. *A Walk on the Supply Side* 85
5. *They Don't Call It Reaganomics Anymore* 109
6. *Confronting the Evil Empire* 129
7. *Making the World Safe for Democracy* 149
8. *And the Wall Came Tumbling Down* 173
9. *The Man Behind the Mask* 199
10. *Spirit of a Leader* 227

Epilogue: *The Road Not Taken* 257

NOTES 265

INDEX 283

Prologue

The Wise Men and the Dummy

SOMETIMES IT REALLY HELPS to be a dummy. Consider the dinner that took place in mid-1985 at Republican grande dame Clare Boothe Luce's apartment in Washington, D.C. Conservative luminaries George Will and Michael Novak were there, and they were taken aback when their president, Ronald Reagan, who was scheduled to meet in Geneva with the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, revealed his naiveté to them in the following way. "I only wish that I could get in a helicopter with Gorbachev," Reagan said, "and fly over the United States. I would ask him to point to people's homes, and we could stop at some of them. Then he would see how Americans live, in clean and lovely homes, with a second car or a boat in the driveway. If I can just get through to him about the difference between our two systems, I really think we could see big changes in the Soviet Union." At this point, Novak recalled, his glance met Will's across the table, and both of them rolled their eyes and sighed.

"Our view," Novak recently told me, "was that it was foolish bordering on suicidal to think that the Soviet leaders would respond to personal initiatives. We thought in terms of a totalitarian system. The particular leader of the Soviet Union didn't matter, because it was the system that dictated policy. It was a bit of a shock, and an

Chapter One

Why Reagan Gets No Respect

RONALD REAGAN DID MORE than any other single man in the second half of the twentieth century to shape our world, yet his presidency and his character remain little understood and often grossly misunderstood. Any intelligent examination of Reagan must begin with the recognition that he was a mystery personally and politically. Most people find this difficult to believe, because during his two terms in office Reagan established an intimate television rapport with us. Whether we approve or disapprove of his policies, we think that we know him. Yet we forget that he was an actor.

Lou Cannon, who has covered Reagan journalistically since the 1960s and written three books about him, told me, "I regard Reagan as a puzzle. I am still trying to understand the man." Virtually everyone who knew Reagan well or observed him closely would agree. They are familiar with the public Reagan, but their efforts to discover the individual behind the mask have proved frustratingly elusive. Historian Edmund Morris, Reagan's official biographer, confesses that from a personal or human point of view, Reagan is the most incomprehensible figure he has ever encountered.¹ Reagan's chief of staff, Donald Regan, who felt an Irish affinity with the