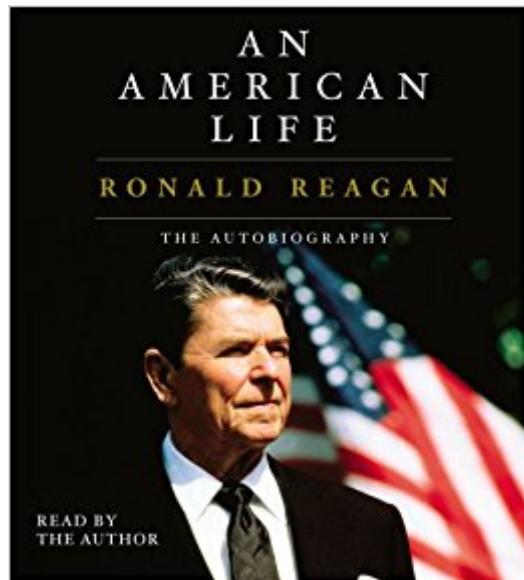


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An American Life: Ronald Reagan



Synopsis

Ronald Reagan's autobiography is a work of major historical importance. Here, in his own words, is the story of his life "public and private" told in a book both frank and compellingly readable. Few presidents have accomplished more, or been so effective in changing the direction of government in ways that are both fundamental and lasting, than Ronald Reagan. Certainly no president has more dramatically raised the American spirit, or done so much to restore national strength and self-confidence. Here, then, is a truly American success story "a great and inspiring one. From modest beginnings as the son of a shoe salesman in Tampico, Illinois, Ronald Reagan achieved first a distinguished career in Hollywood and then, as governor of California and as president of the most powerful nation in the world, a career of public service unique in our history. Ronald Reagan's account of that rise is told here with all the uncompromising candor, modesty, and wit that made him perhaps the most able communicator ever to occupy the White House, and also with the sense of drama of a gifted natural storyteller. He tells us, with warmth and pride, of his early years and of the elements that made him, in later life, a leader of such stubborn integrity, courage, and clear-minded optimism. Reading the account of this childhood, we understand how his parents, struggling to make ends meet despite family problems and the rigors of the Depression, shaped his belief in the virtues of American life "the need to help others, the desire to get ahead and to get things done, the deep trust in the basic goodness, values, and sense of justice of the American people" virtues that few presidents have expressed more eloquently than Ronald Reagan. With absolute authority and a keen eye for the details and the anecdotes that humanize history, Ronald Reagan takes the reader behind the scenes of his extraordinary career, from his first political experiences as president of the Screen Actors Guild (including his first meeting with a beautiful young actress who was later to become Nancy Reagan) to such high points of his presidency as the November 1985 Geneva meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev, during which Reagan invited the Soviet leader outside for a breath of fresh air and then took him off for a walk and a man-to-man chat, without aides, that set the course for arms reduction and charted the end of the Cold War. Here he reveals what went on behind his decision to enter politics and run for the governorship of California, the speech nominating Barry Goldwater that first made Reagan a national political figure, his race for the presidency, his relations with the members of his own cabinet, and his frustrations with Congress. He gives us the details of the great themes and dramatic crises of his eight years in office, from Lebanon to Grenada, from the struggle to achieve arms control to tax reform, from Iran-Contra to the visits abroad that did so much to reestablish the United States in the eyes of the world as a friendly and peaceful power. His narrative is full of

insights, from the unseen dangers of Gorbachev's first visit to the United States to Reagan's own personal correspondence with major foreign leaders, as well as his innermost feelings about life in the White House, the assassination attempt, his family and the enduring love between himself and Mrs. Reagan. *An American Life* is a warm, richly detailed, and deeply human book, a brilliant self-portrait, a significant work of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reagan presents anecdotes about his family, details his ideology, tells of his presidential candidacy and describes his eight years in the White House. Photos. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

"San Francisco Chronicle" Reagan's charm, as displayed throughout this book, is incontestable; so is his grace under pressure. "The Washington Times" One of our classic American success stories.

Although Ronald Reagan created most of this autobiography through taped conversations with another writer, the book is awesome because you get the impression that Reagan is speaking directly to you--which was exactly the intent of his speeches and broadcasts while he was alive. The reader is part of a fascinating journey, that of an entirely human and highly principled man that lives the American Dream while remaining true to himself and his God. There are many other biographies of Reagan out there, but they will not move a reader as this one does, because these are Reagan's own thoughts in a style that mirrors, as closely as possible, the communication style of the President

and private citizen loved by many. The highlight of the book comes in its last third, which chronicles President Reagan's relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev. If for no other reason, buy this book to see how a tough-minded, judicious American President was able to negotiate with the highest-ranking member of the now defunct Soviet Union one-on-one. When I re-read it, it makes me proud to come from the United States and to have lived during the Reagan Era.

These were Reagan's own words - much better than *Killing Reagan* by O'Reilly, who made him out to be weak and ineffective for much of his administration. It was Reagan who turned the economy around - Bill Clinton's administration only benefited by following Reagan's policies because he had no choice, thanks to a Republican Congress.

Reagan's autobiography is a must read for anyone seeking to better understand the 40th president. The writing is clear and flowing. The book provides a fascinating look at Reagan's early life, growing up in Illinois, finding work during the Great Depression as a radio announcer and later actor, and ultimately becoming a TV personality and actor's guild labor union leader. The bulk of the book covers the core issues of his presidency - fighting inflation, supply-side economics, Iran-Contra, and negotiating an end through the Cold War via "peace through strength". I would have liked to read more about his family life; his children are rarely mentioned and his first marriage - which lasted nine years - is hardly discussed. Another minor criticism: in the later half of the book, while discussing his two terms as president, letters or speeches are often quoted at length. This is sometimes useful for the reader, but at times I felt that correspondence between Reagan and others - particularly his Soviet counterparts - could have been summarized rather than quoted in their entirety.

I'm not reviewing the guy's life, just the book. Nicely written autobiography with the right amount of personal reflection and consideration of decisions as he went through life. Not overly detailed, or obsessive about perfect writing (looking at you Thatcher's autobiography), so it reads as though a person is talking to you. Could have been a little more detailed and offered humility with certain poor decisions.

President Reagan was in office in my young days from times I do not remember to the edge of what I can recall. It was somehow comforting to hear his voice and the message he gave in his audio book reminded me that America is something to be proud of, not to be apologized for around the world. While short (3 CD's) the fact that it was written and read in the audio CD by the President

himself made this a very informative, inspiring and encouraging experience. We need someone with the honesty, a good heart, well intentioned, and believing in the people of America and that our time is not over as the leader of the free world but is only beginning. Who can master communication as well as he did, and to capture not only our minds and logic but our hearts as well. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in history and the presidency during Ronald Reagan's era. Five stars, without hesitation. (I only wished it was longer!)

"An American Life" sat on my bookshelf for a couple years, its 700+ pages just appearing too daunting each time I perused my library for my next selection. Finally, six to eight weeks ago I mustered a head full of steam and bored straight into the life and times of Ronald Reagan. Without a doubt, it was more than worth the effort put forth on the reader's part. This autobiography is divided into six parts: his life until arriving in Washington, his first year in office, economic recovery, the Middle East and Grenada, Iran-Contra, and arms negotiations with the Soviets. I buzzed through the part on his childhood through winning the 1980 election. It was as engrossing as it was informative. Amidst his family story, governorship, and presidential campaigns, the words that are most striking are those dedicated to Nancy. His description of his love for her and their relationship would be worth its own book. As the autobiography moves into his presidential years, the narrative slows its pace considerably. It might take the reader a few chapters to adjust. This is greatly due to the inclusion of diary entries (at one point the entries themselves take up many consecutive pages) and letters. While the reader must become more deliberate in his or her reading, it is well worth the insight and intimacy Reagan shares. The letters between him and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev detail the travels from opposed leaders, to negotiation partners, to friends. It gives insight to the final chapters of the Cold War that can be seen nowhere else. "An American Life" also gives great insight to the inner-workings of an administration. President Reagan gives honest analyses of those who served closest to him: their highs, their lows, their strengths, their short-comings, and everything in between. Reagan shares his and his advisors' discussions on policy, on leadership positions, and how they all functioned (or malfunctioned) together. President Reagan attempts to set the record straight on issues ranging from Grenada to the Iran-Contra affair. The challenge for a president to balance his confidential duties and be transparent to the people cannot be easy. After the fact he is able to share some information that was not privy to the general public at the time. Again, it's his honesty and frankness that is appreciated by this reader. Regardless of your thoughts or stances on the Iran-Contra affair, it is necessary to read the President's own words to give thorough criticism or support. "An American Life" is a piece of

unceasing literary importance. For eight years Ronald Reagan oversaw the greatest nation in history. Although not a perfect presidency, it is difficult to comprehend any argument that the United States was not better off in 1989 than it was in 1981. This autobiography is worth reading for Democrats and Republicans alike (not to mention Libertarians, Independents, any other political party members). Many Republicans (particularly those labeled as Neo-Conservatives) are quick to misunderstand his presidency, especially on the foreign affairs front. Meanwhile, Democrats are quick to forget that his ability to speak with and work with the opposing party was not an example of a man who sacrificed his principles to get things done. In "An American Life", President Ronald Reagan gives a first-hand account of eight years that shaped the world. Its significance over the years will only increase, as we look to the past to learn about the future.

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