

## Reagan's America

In an ironic, yet very appropriate, turn of events, our national banner was lowered to half staff all across the country on Sunday, June 6, Flag Day, as the country mourned the passing of its 40th president, Ronald Reagan. It was fitting because no president ever did more to defend, uphold and promote the American flag and the country for which it stood than did Reagan. Our flag, you see, is representative of our independence and our unity as a nation -- one nation, under God, indivisible.

Our country had lost its way in the 1960s and 1970s, and many Americans felt its best days were behind it. When Reagan was inaugurated as president on January 20, 1981, he immediately set out to change that perception. He restored trust in the presidency and he renewed Americans' faith in the future of the country. He often said that the nation's best days were ahead, and his presidency proved that prophecy to be true.

His admirers called him the "Great Communicator," and indeed he was. Reagan was distinguished by oratorical skills unmatched by any U.S. president since John F. Kennedy. Whether the topic was fiscal responsibility or the death of the space shuttle Challenger crew, Reagan put his Hollywood training and talented speech writers to good use. Masterful at connecting with audiences, he inspired listeners with phrases like "morning in America," "evil empire," and "the shining city on the hill" that became part of the national vocabulary.

In addition to renewing America's confidence, Reagan's administration cut taxes and government spending while building up the military, grew the economy, pared federal regulations, appointed the first woman to the U.S. Supreme Court, and developed a personal relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that resulted in tearing down the Berlin Wall.

His retirement from the Oval Office in 1988 saw his life undermined by Alzheimer's disease. In 1994, in a handwritten letter to the public, Reagan announced he had been diagnosed with this brain disorder. "In opening our hearts, we hope this might promote greater awareness of this condition. Perhaps it will encourage a clearer understanding of the individuals and families who are affected by it," Reagan wrote.

He closed by saying, "When the Lord calls me home, whenever that day may be, I will leave with the greatest love for this country of ours and eternal optimism for its future."

And he leaves with the thanks of a grateful nation.

--Beecher Hunter