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Ronald Reagan in 2016: The Symbolic and Political Uses of Collective Memory

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Ronald Reagan in 2016: The Symbolic and Political Uses of Collective Memory

*TAPPER: We have to take another quick break. Coming up, Ronald Reagan looming large over this debate. So how Reaganesque exactly are these Republicans? We will find out next.*¹

INTRODUCTION

While not all references are as blatant as Donald Trump's slogan, "Let's Make America Great Again," it is hard to deny that Ronald Reagan is everywhere in the 2016 Presidential campaign. Whether it is the Republican primary debate in front of his Air Force One, Jeb Bush's "Reagan-Bush 80" t-shirt, or the frequent rhetorical evocations by the candidates, it is hard to miss Reagan's shadow hanging over the Republican candidates, their policies, and their visions for America. Ronald Reagan's son, Ron, recently expressed his distaste with the candidate's prevalent use of his father's legacy:

It just gets old. It seems to me to be kind of an obvious angle to take, because the Republicans keep bringing up my father and they have for a long time. It's for pretty obvious reasons. Who else do the Republicans have who they can hold up as a hero? I mean, unless you want to go back to Abraham Lincoln. And they may not have that much affinity for him! It's not going to be Nixon. It's not going to be H.W. Bush. It's not going to be W either, for various reasons. So it's my father. He's their touchstone. He's their fetish. They've all got to sort of genuflect to him.²

As evidenced by this campaign, and as Ron Reagan suggests, Reagan is the benchmark—perhaps even the “fetish”—that informs much of the Republican candidates' rhetoric at the very least. But how exactly are these candidates using Ronald Reagan? What kind of role do these

¹ Jake Tapper in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate,” *Time*, September 16, 2015, <http://time.com/4037239/second-republican-debate-transcript-cnn/>

² Ron Reagan in Elizabeth F. Ralph, “‘Look in the Mirror, Fat Boy’: Ronald Reagan's Sons Discuss Donald Trump and 2016,” *Politico*, September 16, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/reagan-sons-interview-donald-trump-213149>

references play in overall campaign strategy? What can this study reveal about the use of historical figures in modern day politics? This paper will take up these questions and analyze the rhetorical use of Reagan in the 2016 Republican Primary thus far.

Before embarking on this study, I had three initial hypotheses. One, I assumed that the Republicans were using Reagan to achieve some sense of credibility with their parties and constituents. Two, I anticipated that the candidates would be competing for ownership of Ronald Reagan. In other words, to borrow from classics scholar, Jeremy McInerney, I believed that we would see each of the candidates creating a Reagan to suit his or her “own tastes.”³ Third, I also assumed that these references would primarily be symbolic in nature, lacking any real specificity or substantial content. Of these three, only the first hypothesis about credibility held true. As far as ownership, the candidates did not disagree too much over the details of Reagan’s legacy, nor challenge his collective memory as it is mostly accepted. And most interesting of all, as opposed to staying within the realm of symbolism, instead, what I found was that the majority of the candidates are attempting to extrapolate policy and credibility from a collective memory that is entirely composed of myth and symbolism. By doing so, not only are they misunderstanding the state of Reagan’s collective memory, but they are opening themselves up to a range of historical and political problems, including presentism, fact-checking, party in-fighting, and potential costs for themselves as leaders and followers.

First I will look at the literature on collective memory as a whole so that we can have a better understanding of the field before applying that work to Reagan specifically. Second, we will move to Reagan and examine the key commemorative events leading up to the present that have played a role the development of his legacy. Third, I will discuss my findings for how

³ Jeremy McInerney, “Arrian and the Greek Alexander Romance,” *The Classical World*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (Summer, 2007): 430.

candidates are employing Reagan in the 2016 campaign thus far in relation to my three hypotheses. It is not my objective to be a fact-checker regarding the accuracy of their Reagan references. I am more concerned with how and why these candidates use Reagan, and what we can learn from examining his role in the rhetoric of the 2016 presidential campaign. Lastly, I will conclude with some comments on the implications of these findings for Reagan's legacy, the candidates as potential leaders, the candidates as followers, and some comments on the pervasive role of historical symbolism on our politics.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW: The Formation and Political Use of Collective Memory

The scholarship on collective memory and how it is formed is quite prolific. Disciplines ranging from sociology to psychology have attempted to understand how, what, and why societies remember. Collective memory, best defined as the memory of historical events shared by a group of people, can take many forms. As Barbie Zelizer explains, "In Bernard Lewis' work, for instance, we hear of 'remembered history'—that roughly equivalent to collective memory; 'recovered history'—that recuperated from an earlier rejection by the collective memory; or 'invented history'—history with a purpose, whether it be devised, interpreted, or fabricated."⁴ A key component of all of these definitions, especially of "invented history," is the fact that history and historical figures are removed from their original context and placed in the present or even the future. Collective memory and history are intertwined and share an interesting relationship. Charles Scott examines the root of the word "memory" itself, which "has in its history the ancient Greek word *mermeros*, 'care for' something lovable...When something happens in memory, it is presented in the absence of its original presence."⁵ While collective

⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1995): pp.214–39, 216.

⁵ Charles E. Scott, "The Appearance of Public Memory," in Kendall R. Phillips, Stephen Browne, and Barbara Biesecker, *Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique: Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama

memory for societies is rooted in our remembrance of past events, bringing it into the present context causes loss for the original history, one of the historical problems candidates face. Furthermore, it is this loss that allows for the possibility of appropriation and manipulation for political purposes.

Considering that collective memory is inherently a group exercise, it is important to understand how collective memory is constructed and remembered in public. Kendall Phillips explains the importance of publicness in the formation of collective memory: “To speak of public memory as the memory of publics is to speak of more than many individuals remembering the same thing. It is to speak of a remembrance together, indeed, of remembrance together as a crucial aspect of our togetherness, our existence as a public.”⁶ The sense of publicness allows for groups to share in the experience of the memory and to establish a sense of coherence through their remembrance. This publicness results in a unique opportunity for public memory to be utilized, formed, and changed. Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles differentiate this experience from private recollections, writing, “Unlike individual memory, which is often only present in thought or confined to documents reserved for private consumption, collective memory is public, it is the publicity of collective memory that establishes its political/rhetorical power.”⁷ The nature of that power involves the ability to change this public perception of whatever history is being constructed, and also to use it for political ends. The public forum inherently provides the opportunity for guidance and manipulation of what groups remember—

Press, 2004), pp. 147-156, ProQuest ebrary, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/pugetsound/reader.action?docID=10309041>, 150.

⁶ Kendall R. Phillips, “Introduction” in Kendall R. Phillips, Stephen Browne, and Barbara Biesecker, *Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique: Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp.1-16, ProQuest ebrary, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/pugetsound/reader.action?docID=10309041>, 4.

⁷ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, “Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency: Bill Clinton’s Commemoration of the March on Washington, August 28, 1998,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 68, No. 4, (November 2000): pp.417-437, 418.

using the bully pulpit, if you will—a strategy that has only increased in influence with the ever more important role of the media and public appeals in politics.⁸

The sense of publicness also translates to how collective memory is formed and changed through a process called commemoration. More popularly associated with commemorative events celebrating anniversaries, commemoration provides an opportunity to revise, update, and create public memory of the past. According to Casey, this act of “remembering together” has to occur 1) in a public place, 2) with a public presence, 3) as a part of a public discussion, 4) about a common topic, and 5) be leading towards commemoration in that place.⁹ This process of revision emphasizes the publicness of memory creation and commemoration, which can serve multiple purposes and ends. John R. Gillis elaborates on some of those purposes:

“Commemorative activity is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation.”¹⁰ In other words, commemoration, through the public forum, is how we synthesize our private recollections into one common narrative. It is important to remember that commemoration is a subjective practice entirely dependent on the group doing the remembering, hereby determining what does and does not join the “register of sacred history.”¹¹

The practice of commemoration, in addition to increasing the salience of certain memories in the shaping of collective memory, is a process of forgetting. Touching on Denise M.

⁸ Samuel Kernell, *Going Public* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007).

⁹ Edward S. Casey, “Public Memory in Place and Time,” in Kendall R. Phillips, Stephen Browne, and Barbara Biesecker, *Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique: Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp.17-44, ProQuest ebrary, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/pugetsound/reader.action?docID=10309041>, 34-5.

¹⁰ John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, edited by John R. Gillis, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3-24, 5.

¹¹ Barry Schwartz, “The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Dec. 1982), pp. 374-402, 377.

Bostdorff's concept of "selective appropriation," Gillis adds that "the labor of memory requires forgetting, and the act of forgetting makes possible new memories."¹² This amnesia, which Zelizer describes as "both willed and strategic," has the potential to damage our understanding of our actual history.¹³ As a result, Bostdorff and Goldzwig warn that "to revise public memory...also had great potential to skew history, giving citizens an incomplete and sometimes even harmful view of the past, along with narrow set of procedures for shaping the future."¹⁴ Once again, another historical problem that, not surprisingly, is nearly unavoidable when using history for political purposes. However, this is a process of image revision, not replacement. The old images do not go away, but are merely overlaid with new ones. Barry Schwartz continues, "As each generation modifies the beliefs presented by previous generations, there remains an assemblage of old beliefs coexisting with the new, including old beliefs about the past itself."¹⁵ This process of image revision leads to the possibility that multiple collective memories could exist regarding the same person or event, alluding to the problem of lack of collectiveness inherent in collective memory work. The historical costs of this amnesia and willed forgetting about our own history are that we lose grasp of the past on top of all the layers of our collective memories, all in our attempts to remember.

The inevitable result of the confluence of amnesia, nostalgia, and commemoration is the construction of myth. As Michael Schudson remarks, "We still live in a world of myth and illusion. We still live in a world in which cultural constructions are treated as rock-solid

¹² Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, "History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr: Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 35 No. 4 (December 2005). And Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,"

¹³ Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," 220.

¹⁴ Bostdorff and Goldzwig, "History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr: Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy," 667.

¹⁵ Schwartz, "Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington," 234.

foundations of existence, belief and action.”¹⁶ In the construction of memory, we can consider mythic rhetoric as an addition to the rhetorical triangle. Pathos is comprised of symbolism, personal stories and experiences from politicians used for emotional appeal. Ethos involves establishing credibility through political associations to the past. Logos implies using actual words and policies from past leaders to frame remembrance of past and future vision. The new addition of “mythos,” as David R. Maines et al describe it, is the invocation of the mythologized past to frame future action.¹⁷ For the uses of this mythos, Maines et al describes G.H. Mead’s “*symbolic mobilization theory*” which holds that “mythical pasts in this sense can be linked to what might be called mythical futures.”¹⁸ The creation and invocation of these myths leads to their removal from the mythic realm into a somewhat accepted reality. It is what the organizations and individuals at the head of these reconstructions do that makes collective memory a powerful rhetorical tool.

The nature of this power, derived from the publicness and mythos as shown above, persists in the intentional uses of historical legacies by both collectives and individuals. Jeffrey S. Bednar, in his study of organizational legacies, outlined four functions for historical legacies in organizations: 1) Evaluating behavior to serve as “representation of the organization’s oral framework;”¹⁹ 2) Motivating behavior: that “benefits the collective;”²⁰ 3) Fostering accountability “for the decisions that individuals make;”²¹ and 4) Legitimizing organizational actions “especially during times of change.”²² These are the various ways historical legacies

¹⁶ Michael Schudson, “Ronald Reagan Misremembered,” in *Collective Remembering*, edited by David Middleton and Derek Edwards, (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), pp. 108-119, 117.

¹⁷ David R. Maines, Noreen M. Sugrue, and Michael A. Katovich, “The Sociological Import of G.H. Mead’s Theory of the Past,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol.48, No. 2 (April 1983): pp.161-173., 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁹ Jeffrey S. Bednar, “Legacies in Organizations,” Dissertation, (University of Michigan: 2013), 150.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

²² *Ibid.*, 157.

function, but they can also be purposefully utilized and directed. For organizations, legacies can become a part of their mythology. This concept is especially true when considering nations and their founding moments, as Schwartz explains, “America’s originating events and early leaders are not symbols of national unity because of their priority and factual importance but because this priority and this importance have become and remained convenient objects of consensus among later generations.”²³ Long after past leaders are gone, these are just some of the ways the collective memories of historical figures can be utilized within organizational settings, hereby becoming associated with the organization’s legacy itself.

Often this membership and organizational identity is even further narrowed to association with great former leaders. The process of remembering leaders who have passed away can lead to idealization and an erasure of negative qualities. S.T. Allison et al conducted multiple studies about members of organizations and their views of leaders. They found a *death positivity bias* in the remembrance of leaders:

Sociologists and psychologists have found that an important and natural part of the bereavement process includes a period of “idealization” of the dead, during which people form idealized images of the deceased person by focusing almost exclusively on the person’s positive qualities. Idealization serves an important healing role by reminding survivors that the dead represent positive role models whose actions and values are to be revered and emulated.²⁴

Because of this idealization and death positivity bias, the participants rated the leaders as much more effective when told that the leaders were dead as when they were told that the leader was still alive. As Bednar explains, after death, leaders are often viewed as greater in the organization than they were in reality: “Death also lends itself to immortality as organizations, as enduring

²³ Schwartz, “The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory,” (1982), 396.

²⁴ S. T. Allison, D. Eylon, J.K. Beggan, & J. Bachelder, “The demise of leadership: Positivity and negativity in evaluations of dead leaders,” *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20, (2009), pp. 115-129, 6.

social entities, offer the potential for a form of symbolic immortality.²⁵ To put it simply, within some organizations, certain individuals seem to “live on” after they are gone.²⁶ We often refer to these individuals as having a legacy, or a representation that endures in the collective memory of the group after their departure. While these leaders may live on in the sense that their leadership remains after they have left, the present members of the organization also benefit from the fact that these leaders are dead and cannot speak for themselves. Although this is the root of the historical problems, as Schwartz explains, this principle is the *convenience* of the leader being dead.²⁷ As a result, the organization is free to shape, appropriate, and mold the memory of their leader in the collective organization to serve their needs.

The confluence of myth, idealization, and death positivity bias all leads to an increase in symbolic power. Michael Novak, in *Choosing our King*, investigates the composition and pervasive power of symbols. He describes them as follows: “symbols aim at the complex texture of experiences...symbols are aimed at our passionate intelligence, concerned with how we should shape our lives...symbols relate the future to a past, offering to individuals and groups an identity through time.”²⁸ It is this last notion of creating an “identity through time” that collective memory work is so interested in. As shown by Bednar’s work with organizational legacies, dead leaders can form a point of consensus for employees due to the very fact that idealization has led to the construction of a symbol. These symbols are built up by of specific actions the person took while they were alive, but characteristics and personal qualities. For example, Novak includes a discussion of Barber’s three qualities that compose symbolic power: “world view, style, and

²⁵ Bednar, “Legacies in Organizations,” 2.

²⁶ Ibid., XI.

²⁷ Barry Schwartz, “Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (April 1991), pp. 221-236, 231.

²⁸ Michael Novak, *Choosing Our King: Powerful Symbols in Presidential Politics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 9.

character.”²⁹ Similarly, Novak himself names eight qualities that he believes Americans have loved in their presidents: action, honesty, goodness, self-control, genuine emotion, administrative control, decisiveness, and “an instinct for ends and means that are ‘characteristically American.’”³⁰ When leaders, presidents especially, pass away into collective memory, they themselves become symbols; representative of values, ideals, and qualities that transcend their specific policies. It is these qualities composing being “characteristically American” that are at the heart of commemoration and that account for the reliance on heroes of the past to inform modern day political images.

In light of the potential utility of historical legacies, the mythos associated with nostalgia and identity construction, and the implications for the future of organizations, how do these elites construct collective memory? Robert S. Jansen is one of the first scholars to take up this question and to establish a model for analyzing “reputational entrepreneurs” and the reputational trajectories of the figures they are commemorating. His model consists of the manipulation of three factors: salience, valence, and ownership. Salience is the degree to which some figures are known more than others (For example think of Abraham Lincoln versus Millard Fillmore). Valence is the “charge” associated with the figure’s reputation, and can be positive, negative, or neutral to varying degrees (Consider Benedict Arnold versus George Washington). Lastly, ownership is defined as “which group can legitimately be said to descend from or represent the essence of a given figure.”³¹ These factors both provide limits and possibilities. Jansen explains, “To recapitulate: reputational trajectories—themselves the result of a history of past memory work—provide reputational entrepreneurs with a limited set of symbolic conditions that both

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Ibid., 233-36.

³¹ Robert S. Jansen, “Resurrection and Appropriation: Reputational Trajectories, Memory Work, and the Political Use of Historical Figures,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (January 2007): 953-1007, 963.

constrain and enable particular options for memory work.”³² Jansen’s work is the first attempt to bring the subject of collective memory into political science, effectively showing one model for how and why it can be appropriated by reputational entrepreneurs.

Using Jansen’s model, I seek to examine how the 2016 Republican candidates are acting as reputational entrepreneurs for Ronald Reagan’s legacy. For all of the amnesia, nostalgia, and mythos associated with Ronald Reagan, he is an ideal case study for the political use of historical legacies under Jansen’s model due to his high “potential political utility.”³³ In this case, the campaigns themselves serve as the commemorative events, where the candidates are constantly given a forum to announce, revise, and shape a Reagan for their own purposes. As far as organizational legacies and the connection of dead leaders, the Republican Party itself serves as the organization in question, as the battle over the appropriation of Reagan’s legacy has implications for the future of the party and the identity of all of those who vote Republican. And for the reputational entrepreneurs, the candidates are themselves the new elites seeking leadership of said organization and simultaneously attempting to form the collective memory for the public. I seek to examine not only how the Republican candidates are shaping Reagan through their constant commemoration and appropriation, but how in turn, this practice is shaping themselves as future leaders of the Republican Party, and potentially, the nation.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE MYTH: Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party

Before examining the rhetoric used by the 2016 Republican candidates, it is important to briefly discuss the key developmental moments of Reagan’s legacy. In his history of the Republican Party, Lewis L. Gould sums up the seemingly paradoxical nature of Reagan’s legacy as many know it today: On the one hand, “Reagan’s partisans contend that he revolutionized

³² Ibid., 993.

³³ Ibid., 964.

American politics, restored the authority of the presidency, and laid the basis for victory in the Cold War.”³⁴ He continues, “On the other hand, critics point to the substantial budget deficits he left behind, the social costs of his economic policies, and the mistakes of his second term, such as the savings and loan scandal and the Iran-Contra affair.”³⁵ While Reagan’s presidency was by no means free of scandal and blunders, the predominant narrative is the one promoted by Republicans and then accepted by the general public of Republicans:

Republican devotion to his legacy has become so pronounced that Reagan has evolved into a totemic, almost deified figure. In the minds of his admirers, there should be a Reagan memorial in every state, a fifth face on Mount Rushmore, and his image on the dime like (or instead of) Franklin D. Roosevelt.³⁶

By looking at various opinion polls from scholars and the public, two patterns become clear. One, that Reagan is often ranked higher in public opinion polls than in rankings created by historians, suggesting a disconnect between his symbolic and political presidencies. And two, within the public polls, Reagan’s ranking has increased the further we get from his presidency.³⁷ He has come to be one of the presidential greats we all learn about in school, and for many Americans is the very embodiment of patriotism, presidentialism, and piousness. Along the way the corruption in his administration, such as the Iran-Contra affair, has been erased, and the sense of the real Reagan has since been swallowed by the mythic Reagan. We must ask ourselves, how did we get here?

Despite Reagan’s present popularity within the Republican Party, opinion polls at the time of Reagan’s presidency reveal a mixed opinion, one that is not all positive (Fig. 1). As far as media coverage, Allison et al show that “Media coverage about Reagan during his presidency

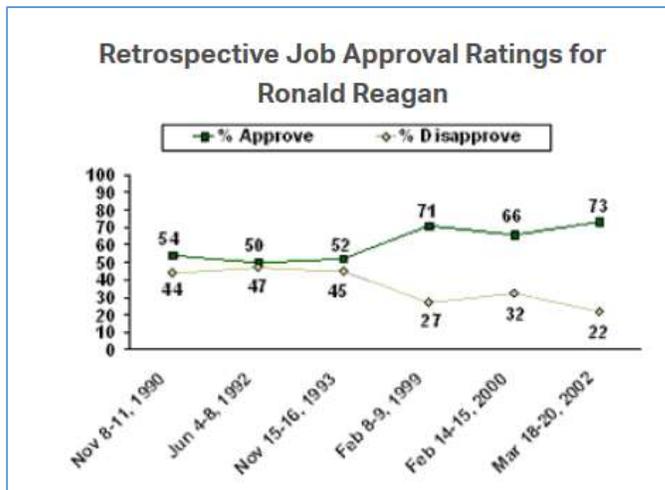
³⁴ Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003), 421.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 404-5.

³⁷ “Historical Rankings of Presidents of the United States,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_rankings_of_Presidents_of_the_United_States

was more negative than that of virtually all his predecessors, and yet the same media posthumously showered him with many accolades.”³⁸



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Figure 1: The spike between 1993 and 1999 can be accounted for by both Reagan’s release of the Alzheimer’s Letter, Nancy Reagan’s speech at the Republican National Convention, and Bill Clinton’s scandals in 1997.

The rest of the data, as many historians note, shows a division between policy and symbolism. Gallup polls from 1984-85 can be summed up as, “while a *minority* of those polled agreed with Reagan on specific issues or approved of policies that were unquestionably his, the vast *majority* approved of his ‘performance’ as president.”⁴⁰ This pattern was reinforced scientifically by Dan Thomas and Larry R. Baas who conducted an experiment in 1988 where they asked participants to score various statements on a scale of -5 (I strongly disagree) to +5 (I strongly agree).⁴¹ They found that there were more positive scores about the statements that emphasized symbolism⁴² and negative scores on statements including specific policy platforms.⁴³ Another way to view

³⁸ Allison et al, “The demise of leadership: Positivity and negativity in evaluations of dead leaders,” 3.

³⁹ Frank Newport, Jeffrey M. Jones, and Lydia Saad, “Ronald Reagan From the People’s Perspective: A Gallup Poll Review,” *Gallup*, June 7, 2004, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/11887/ronald-reagan-from-peoples-perspective-gallup-poll-review.aspx>

⁴⁰ Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future*, 30.

⁴¹ Dan Thomas and Larry R. Baas, “Ronald Reagan in the Public Mind,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 1993): pp.55-75, 70-71.

⁴² Such as: #22. “He was a father figure and a throw back to the days when things were seemingly simple. He projected himself as standing for a great strong America. Much of the 80’s were filled with questions and during that time it was important to have a stabilizing type figure like Reagan as our leader.” In Thomas and Baas, 64.

⁴³ Such as: #48. “In launching the strategic defense initiative (SDI), Reagan left perhaps his most indispensable legacy: a commitment to use new information technologies to bring the arms race under control at last—under American control, the only kind of control that really matters.” In Thomas and Baas, 61.

this division, as shown by Allison et al, is between morality and competence, with the former seeming to be more important to the public being surveyed.⁴⁴ So while Reagan's policies were not necessarily very popular even at the time, Reagan was praised more for his personality and symbolism, two aspects of his legacy that remain prevalent today.

As far as personality, Reagan was able to use his likeability to win over other members of Washington politics and journalism. Schudson explains, "The Washington elite of Congress, the media and others trusted their own gut political judgements much more fully than they trusted the polls."⁴⁵ Similarly, for journalists, "In the face-to-face world of Washington journalism, Ronald Reagan was king. The media, the Congress and Washington officialdom in general liked Reagan personally."⁴⁶ Returning to Thomas and Baas' experiment, they found that the positive associations with Reagan as a person had led the public to personally identify with him. Thomas and Baas explain, "Americans were 'enabled,' in part, to embrace Reagan's reconciliation of the rift between 'things as they are' and 'things as we would like to think they once were' by virtue of their deep *personal identification* with the ex-president."⁴⁷ Again, this identification was with the personal qualities of Reagan, and was not rooted in his policy. Stephen Ducat, also writing in the 1980's but from a semi-psychological perspective, argues that in the 1980's the American public had been raised with narcissistic parenting, as opposed to authoritative parenting, and therefore was more liable to fall victim to the "infantilizing political discourse" promoted by Reagan.⁴⁸ This legacy of Reagan was carefully crafted throughout his presidency, and existed as early as 1988, even before the later mythmakers began their work. Already, Reagan was crafting

⁴⁴ Allison et al, "The demise of leadership: Positivity and negativity in evaluations of dead leaders," 41.

⁴⁵ Schudson, "Ronald Reagan Misremembered," 113.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁷ Thomas, Dan and Larry R. Baas, "Ronald Reagan in the Public Mind," 70-71.

⁴⁸ Stephen Ducat, *Taken In: American Gullibility & the Reagan Mythos* (Tacoma, WA: Life Sciences Press, 1988), 100.

his presence in collective memory to consist of his likeability and his overall “performance,” as opposed to his policy.

Closely connected to the idea of Reagan’s personality is the nature of his symbolic power emerging throughout his presidency. In his first election, his campaign slogan was a call to action: “let’s make America great again!” Drawing on the conception in the public mind of nostalgia for a greater America, Reagan was promising that he was the one with the ability to do this. And again, in 1984, he proclaimed that it is “Morning in America Again,” simultaneously implying that both progress had been made but that there was still work to be done. Richard Darman, Assistant White House Chief of Staff, wrote a memo describing the symbolic importance of the 1984 Reagan campaign: “Paint Ronald Reagan as the personification of all that is right with or heroized by America. Leave Mondale in a position where an attack on Reagan is tantamount to an attack on American’s idealized image of itself—where a vote against Reagan is, in some subliminal sense, a vote against mythic AMERICA.”⁴⁹ Similarly, in his farewell address to the nation, Reagan left his audience with a list of policy accomplishments but distinguished his proudest accomplishment as a symbolic one: “the resurgence of national pride that I called the new patriotism.”⁵⁰ As shown by the opinion polls and writings of the time, Reagan was already becoming remembered more for his personal qualities and symbolic power, leading to an overlooking of his greater policy failures by the public, media, and fellow Washington community members.

⁴⁹ Richard Darman in Stephen Ducat, *Taken In: American Gullibility & the Reagan Mythos*, 95.

Or conversely, “A vote for Ronald Reagan equals a vote for a mythic America” from Richard Darman’s memo. In Jane Blankenship and Janette Kenner Muir, “The Transformation of Actor to Scene: Some Strategic Grounds of the Reagan Legacy,” in *Reagan and Public Discourse in America*, edited by Michael Weiler and W. Barnett Pearce, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1992): pp.135-160, 159.

⁵⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Farewell Address to the Nation,” *The American Presidency Project*, January 11, 1989, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29650>

As means of fostering this symbolic power, Reagan also took it upon himself to rhetorically construct his own legacy upon leaving the White House. Amos Kiewe argues that Reagan's Farewell Address can be viewed as a self-eulogy before death. As Kiewe explains, "Reagan developed his persona mythically by converting the temporal into timeless and hence into memory."⁵¹ Significantly, although Reagan does mention specific policy achievements, his great pride is the symbolic accomplishments that cannot be defined:

We've done our part. And as I walk off into the city streets, a final word to the men and women of the Reagan revolution, the men and women across America who for 8 years did the work that brought America back. My friends: We did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference...Once you begin a great movement, there's no telling where it will end. We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed a world.⁵²

In light of the previously-mentioned death positivity bias, Allison et al argue that leaders have the opportunity before their death "to craft constructive posthumous legacies for themselves and for their organizations."⁵³ In this case, Reagan was able to offer his assessment of what his presidency and organization—the new Republican Party—had been able to accomplish. As Kiewe argues, Reagan framed for his audience what was important to remember about his administration, stressing optimism and patriotism, (akin to Andrew Jackson's Nature, Providence, and Will as highlighted by John William Ward), that would come to shape his legacy.⁵⁴

Questions of memory and amnesia in relation to Reagan's legacy came into the public forum with his Alzheimer's Letter of 1994. In this letter, Reagan reinforced his symbolic power and the image he had been crafting for the past decade. He wrote, "In closing, let me thank you,

⁵¹ Amos Kiewe, "Framing Memory through Eulogy: Ronald Reagan's Long Good-bye," in Kendall R. Phillips, Stephen Browne, and Barbara Biesecker, *Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique: Framing Public Memory*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press: 2004), pp.248-264, ProQuest ebrary. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/pugetsound/reader.action?docID=10309041> Ebook., 250.

⁵² Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation."

⁵³ Allison et al, "The demise of leadership: Positivity and negativity in evaluations of dead leaders," 13.

⁵⁴ John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 207.

the American people, for giving me the great honor of allowing me to serve as your president. When the Lord calls me home, whenever that may be, I will leave the greatest love for this country of ours and eternal optimism for its future.”⁵⁵ This repetition of terms such as “optimism” and the reference to his patriotism once again overshadow the policy legacy of his presidency. This pattern can be traced in other seemingly amnesia-driven forgetfulness—whether related to Alzheimer’s or not—in both Reagan’s leadership and his subsequent memory construction. In relation to the Iran Contra hearings, Reagan’s memory became a point of concern, as an article from the *Seattle Times* states “The words ‘I don’t remember’ or their equivalents occurred at least 124 times in his eight hours of testimony.”⁵⁶ Michael Kammen argues that Reagan and his team “deliberately (though not exactly deftly) attempted to distort public memory in order to advance an ideological agenda.”⁵⁷ Whether they were as a result of his Alzheimer’s or not, issues related to amnesia and forgetting were always closely associated with the Reagan administration. With the announcement of his illness, Reagan can be said to have experienced a somewhat symbolic death, and it would be just a few short years before the mythmakers began their work.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Primary Resources: Alzheimer’s Letter,” *American Experience*, November 5, 1994, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/reagan-alzheimers/>

⁵⁶ Ethan Bronner, “Iran-Contra Deposition—Reagan Testimony Bares Memory Loss, But Not Much Else,” *The Seattle Times*, February 23, 1990.

<http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19900223&slug=1057639>

⁵⁷ Michael Kammen, “Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American Memory,” in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, edited by Daniel L. Schacter, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) pp.329-345, 339.

⁵⁸ Yet, despite Reagan’s announcement and attempts at constructing his own legacy before death, his son Michael suggests that the myth-making had not yet begun. In contrast, he expressed frustration that the party was not using his father appropriately: “Although my father is the one afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease, I sometimes think the Republicans are suffering a much greater memory loss. They have forgotten Ronald Reagan’s accomplishments—and that is why we have lost so many of them.” Michael Reagan in William Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 150.

With Reagan incapacitated by his illness, the next fundamental commemorative moment in the early years of his legacy construction was Nancy Reagan's speech at the 1996 Republican National Convention. Similar to Reagan's Farewell Address, Kiewe contends that Nancy Reagan's speech was another example of a eulogy before death.⁵⁹ In reality, her speech was very much an extension of Reagan's own self-eulogy, as she repeated both his exact rhetoric and also the spirit of his rhetoric. As far as exact phrasing, she reiterated his appropriation of John Winthrop's City Upon a Hill: "he still sees the shining city on the hill, a place of full of hope and promise for us all."⁶⁰ And, as far as the spirit of his rhetoric, we once again see the repetition of Reagan's self-proclaimed optimism and patriotism that by 1996 we have already seen reinforced multiple times. She said, "But Ronnie's spirit, his optimism, his never failing belief in the strength and goodness of America is still very strong. If he were able to be here tonight, he would once again remind us of the power of each individual, urging us once again to fly as high as our wings will take us and to never give up on America."⁶¹ By repeating Reagan's same iconic phrases, she was reminding the audience of the very points he himself emphasized. Nancy Reagan's speech, viewed in the context of Reagan's symbolic death through his Alzheimer's Letter, serves as one of the first major moments of commemoration by another, and ultimately offered the launching pad for the construction of Reagan's myth by others.

Following Nancy Reagan's address and the Republican loss in 1996, 1997 marks a turning point in Reagan's public collective memory. For one, President Bill Clinton began to be wrapped up in some personal scandals, most notably the Monica Lewinsky affair. Clinton's indiscretions, William Bunch argues, opened up the chance to offer up Reagan as the paragon of

⁵⁹ Kiewe, "Framing Memory through Eulogy: Ronald Reagan's Long Good-bye," 248.

⁶⁰ Nancy Reagan, "Speech to the 1996 Republican National Convention," *Gifts of Speech*, August 12, 1996, <http://gos.sbc.edu/r/reagan2.html>

⁶¹ Ibid.

what we expect from our president. Clinton could be turned into a “Bizarro World Ronald Reagan” and “the antimatter version of the 1980s president.”⁶² Drawing from the aforementioned symbolic legacy in development, Reagan represented everything moral and patriotic that Clinton was not. In this same year, the Americans for Tax Reform, led by Grover Norquist, established the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project. The main goal of this organization, along with replacing Hamilton with Reagan on the ten dollar bill and “ensuring that every February 6th is known as ‘Ronald Reagan Day,’” was to have a monument to Reagan established in every county in the United States. The organization, which still exists today, describes their mission statement as follows: “Each one of these dedications serve as a teaching moment for those who were not yet alive during his presidency or to grant those who remember him with the opportunity to reflect on his accomplishments.”⁶³ As former director Michael Kamburovski, explains, the goal of the ubiquitous monuments was to make visitors ask, “Who was this man to have so many things named after him?”⁶⁴ 1997 was a pivotal year for the construction of Reagan’s legacy, as what had previously only been undertaken by Reagan himself and those closest to him, such as his wife and advisors, was now being taken up by larger public groups.⁶⁵

⁶² William Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 158.

⁶³ “About the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project,” *The Ronald Reagan Legacy Project*, <http://www.ronaldreaganlegacyproject.org/about>

⁶⁴ Michael Kamburovski in Stephen M. Silverman, “Reagan’s Sweet Legacy,” *People Magazine*, September 17, 1997, <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,621702,00.html>

⁶⁵ I will not go into it here, but it is also important to note the role of historians, journalists, and former Reagan staffers in the mythmaking process during the years leading to his death. Their works reinforced the image Reagan himself had begun to craft, as well as those efforts by the Legacy Project and other politicians. For some hagiographic interpretations, see Garry Willis *Reagan’s America: Innocents at Home* (1987), Peggy Noonan’s *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (2001), John Harmer’s *Reagan: Man of Principle* (2002), Peter Schweizer’s *Reagan’s War: The Epic Story of His Forty Year Struggle and Final Triumph Over Communism* (2002), and Peter Robinson’s *How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life* (2003). Several works also specifically revised Reagan into a pious religious man far beyond what he really was. For example, see Paul Kengor’s *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (2004) and Mary Beth Brown’s *Hand of Providence: The Strong and Quiet Faith of Ronald Reagan* (2005).

Ronald Reagan's death in 2004 ushered in the most significant commemoration of his public legacy and affirmation of the seeds he had planted himself. During the period from Reagan's Alzheimer's announcement to his death in 2004, the media had refrained from too harsh of criticism and challenging of his growing legacy. Bunch elaborates:

The Reagan myth became so critical to the conservative movement that the distortions of exactly who he was and what his legacy was became much more elaborate and more sophisticated during the early 2000's. In many ways, the era was propitious for building an impenetrable legend about him. As we've already seen, the fact of Reagan's lingering illness for the first half of the decade, followed by his death and a new era of good feeling for his widow Nancy...made it awkward and difficult for Democrats and the media to offer blunt criticisms.⁶⁶

This pattern was only amplified after his death, as Allison et al explain in relation to death positivity bias, "We suggest that Reagan's posthumous media coverage was more positive because his death elicited the strong universal norm to avoid speaking ill of the dead."⁶⁷ But as Schudson said, the convenience of being dead is that Reagan could no longer shape his own legacy, so reputational entrepreneurs were free to do with his memory as they willed.

His funeral should be viewed as a moment for commemoration, as even at the time White House advisor Rick Ahearn termed it "a legacy-building event."⁶⁸ Mimicking the words uttered upon Abraham Lincoln's passing, George W. Bush remarked, "Ronald Reagan belongs to the ages now, but we preferred it when he belonged to us."⁶⁹ Along with this silencing of criticism rose an increase in praise and mythmaking, starting with the "legacy-building event" at Reagan's Funeral. George W. Bush offered remarks that echoed the familiar symbolic nature of what Reagan represented for the country: "Ronald Reagan believed that everything happened for a

⁶⁶ Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future*, 191-192.

⁶⁷ Allison et al, "The demise of leadership: Positivity and negativity in evaluations of dead leaders," 3.

⁶⁸ Rick Ahearn in Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future*, 187.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

reason, and that we should strive to know and do the will of God...He believed that America was not just a place in the world, but the hope of the world.”⁷⁰ With his death, Ronald Reagan officially became public property for memory reconstruction, yet he had already set the pace with his repetition of optimism, patriotism, and overall symbolism masking the policy failures and scandals of his administration.

As the discussion of these key commemorative moments has shown, the mythmaking of Reagan was by no means immediate upon the end of his presidency. In fact, Reagan had a split legacy divided on the lines of policy and symbolism/personality, with the former more negative than the latter. Although the majority of the memory work by outside groups was taken on after 1997, Reagan has played some role in all the elections following his exit from the White House. In 1988, political cartoons came out portraying George H.W. Bush as surrogate mother to Reagan’s politics.⁷¹ In Skowronek’s terms, Bush I was the faithful son practicing the politics of articulation of Reagan’s policy. He was the direct inheritor of Reagan’s administration.⁷² In 2000 with the emergence of a second Bush, Cal Thomas, a conservative pundit, remarked that G.W. Bush should be viewed as a “Reagan III, not Bush II.”⁷³ In 2008, neither party felt that they could speak negatively against Ronald Reagan’s increasingly positive public view, forcing

⁷⁰ George W. Bush, “President Bush’s Eulogy at Funeral Service for President Reagan,” *The White House Archives-George W. Bush*, June 11, 2004, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040611-2.html>.

⁷¹ Stephen Ducat, *Taken In: American Gullibility & the Reagan Mythos*, (Tacoma, WA: Life Sciences Press, 1988), 160.

⁷² Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997).

⁷³ Cal Thomas in Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future*, 162.

Bush II somewhat followed this pattern, but as Bunch argues, maybe not in the way he intended: “He managed to copy the worst of Reagan’s presidency: the runaway debt to fund policies that benefitted the rich; a view of the Constitution as merely an occasional hindrance; a probusiness bias that allowed investment banks to implode in the late 2000’s...and a refusal to confront any problem like climate change that could only be addressed through citizen cooperation and sacrifice.” (Bunch, 168)

Barack Obama to find positive things to say about him.⁷⁴ And again, in 2012, several Republicans framed the election as the search for the “next Reagan.”⁷⁵ The creation of this New Patriotism, as well as his symbolic accomplishments for America, have permeated our current remembrance. Stephen Knott, founder of Reagan Oral History Project, lamented that the Ronald Reagan Library was more intent on displaying the Air Force One than the oral history project. This tradition of amnesia has also persisted, as there is no mention at Library and Museum of the debt, federal payroll increase, or Iran Contra. This quick survey brings us to 2016, when more than any election before it, the candidates on the Republican side seem to be in a competition to “out-Reagan” each other.⁷⁶ Let us now turn to the examination of the nature and details of this memory reconstruction and the work of our latest batch of reputational entrepreneurs.

III: THE CANDIDATES, REAGAN, AND THE 2016 CAMPAIGN

Now a quick word on my methods. For my candidates, I looked at the ten candidates still in the race as of November 1st who have been participating in the primetime debates. This includes Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, Mike Huckabee, John Kasich, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, and Donald Trump. For my source materials, I consulted their campaign announcements, the first four debates, the material on their campaign websites, their advertisements, and any works they have published along with their campaigns. I did not consult works written by the candidates prior to 2015 for two reasons: one, so that I do not have to account for candidates’ changing their minds about Reagan or their partisan identification, and two, so I can treat this campaign as a series of commemorative events in the context of this year,

⁷⁴ Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics And Haunts Our Future*

⁷⁵ David Brody, “Election 2012: Searching for the ‘Next Ronald Reagan,’” *CBN News*, March 1, 2011, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/politics/2011/February/Election-2012-Searching-for-the-Next-Ronald-Reagan/>

⁷⁶ Nick Gass, “Watch the GOP contenders try to out-Reagan one another,” *Politico*, September 14, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/09/ronald-reagan-gop-candidates-2016-legacy-213597>.

and not the past. When I looked through these materials, I then recorded the Reagan references organized by candidate, policy category of the reference (such as foreign policy or economy), Jansen's three factors (salience (known or less known), valence (positive, neutral, negative), and ownership), and rhetorical function (pathos, ethos, logos, mythos). Let us now turn to the most interesting observations from the data as they relate to my three hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Credibility as an Individual and Party

As previously mentioned, I hypothesized that the most prevalent rhetorical strategy utilized by the candidates would be credibility, which ended up being the case. In its most simple form, some candidates have felt the need to reassure the audience that they were Reagan supporters. For example, Chris Christie in the second debate stated, "I turned 18 in 1980, and my first vote was for Ronald Reagan. Boy, am I glad I did it. And I think the country is, too. A Christie presidency won't be about me. It will be about you."⁷⁷ This blatant plea is just one example of the ways candidates use Reagan to assert their credibility and then relate him to their own goals as president. The use and purpose of this credibility manifested itself in three main forms: one, credibility as a Republican, two, credibility of specific policies, and three, credibility of the Republican Party against the Democratic opposition.

Credibility as a Republican

For some candidates, they related their credibility as a Republican to their relationships to the Reagan administration. Carly Fiorina especially based her credibility on her personal connections to former Reagan staffers. In her book, *My Leadership Journey*, she makes frequent references to said connections, including Ken Khachigian, a former speechwriter, and Stu

⁷⁷ Chris Christie in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate," *Time*, September 16, 2015, <http://time.com/4037239/second-republican-debate-transcript-cnn/>

Spencer, Ronald Reagan's campaign manager.⁷⁸ She even highlights the significance of the fact that she had the chance to join the list of leaders who had spoken at CPAC. She notes, “Great conservative leaders, from Ronald Reagan to presidential contenders since the 1970s, have addressed CPAC.”⁷⁹ Aside from former staffers, John Kasich illustrates another form of connection as he frequently references the fact that he was politically active around Reagan’s presidency. Specifically, he associates himself with Reagan’s platform as a whole: “As a young man in my first election in 1978, I defeated an incumbent Democrat. I defeated an incumbent Democrat in 1982; running on the Reagan program, I was the only Republican in America to defeat an incumbent Democrat that year.”⁸⁰ Both Fiorina and Kasich emphasize that they have personal connections to Reagan and his staffers, hereby attempting to build their credibility as Republicans.

Other candidates base the legitimacy of their *behavior* as a Republican on some use or connection to Ronald Reagan. For example, Ben Carson upholds himself to Reagan’s views on how to treat his fellow Republicans, stating, “I do, however, believe in Reagan's 11th commandment, and will not be engaging in awful things about my compatriots here.”⁸¹ Gould summarizes Reagan’s 11th commandment as follows: “Reagan himself had often invoked what he called the Eleventh Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican.’”⁸² In a similar vein, Trump uses Reagan to justify his own flimsy record as a Republican. When asked about his past as a Democrat-supporter, Trump replied, “I’ll tell you what. I’ve evolved on many

⁷⁸ Carly Fiorina, *Rising to the Challenge: My Leadership Journey*, (New York: Sentinel, 2015), 101, 116.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 142

⁸⁰ John Kasich in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate.”

⁸¹ Ben Carson in “The third Republican debate transcript, annotated,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/10/28/the-third-republican-debate-annotating-the-transcript/>

⁸² Ronald Reagan in Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans*, 404.

issues over the years. And you know who else has? Ronald Reagan evolved on many issues.”⁸³

In these cases, Carson and Trump both used Reagan as their model or justification for the way they carry themselves as Republicans. And in the case of Trump, to validate his allegiance to the Republican Party in light of a Democratic past.

Credibility of their policies

As far as specific policies, Reagan was used frequently by candidates to gain credibility of their economic policies. On his campaign website, Jeb Bush has set his goal to achieve the “lowest tax rate since Reagan.”⁸⁴ Similarly, Reagan also acts as the economic model to emulate for Ted Cruz, who gives a history lesson on the role of pursuing tax reform, sound money, and regulatory reform. He stated, “Every time we've pursued all three of those -- whether in the 1920s with Calvin Coolidge or the 1960s with JFK or the 1980s with Ronald Reagan -- the result has been incredible economic growth. We have done it before, and with leadership, we can do it again.”⁸⁵ This reference was the only example I came across where another president was used in relation to Reagan, and also an example of using a historical anecdote with lower salience than Reagan. As opposed to using Reagan as his benchmark, Kasich boasts to already have had success using Reagan’s economic plan: “In Ohio, our wages are growing faster than the national average. We've cut taxes, balanced budgets, changed the regulatory environment. Folks, you want to--fix America, this is the formula. It worked for Reagan and it works for our team in Ohio.”⁸⁶ Whether as a benchmark or as a proven record of success, the economy was one of the most frequently associated policy areas with Reagan used by the candidates.

⁸³ Donald Trump in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Primetime Republican Debate,” *Time*, August 11, 2015, <http://time.com/3988276/republican-debate-primetime-transcript-full-text/> (DEBATE 1)

⁸⁴ Jeb Bush, “Jeb! 2016,” Campaign Website, <https://jeb2016.com/?lang=en>

⁸⁵ Ted Cruz in “Republican debate transcript: primetime debate on economy,” *CBS News*, November 11, 2015, Courtesy Fox Business Network Anchor. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/republican-debate-transcript-primetime-debate-on-economy/>

⁸⁶ Kasich in “The third Republican debate transcript, annotated.”

The candidates gave a similar treatment to another reoccurring policy area, foreign policy. The most consistent user of Reagan for foreign policy legitimacy is Rand Paul, which will be discussed in more detail later. For now, it is important to know that Paul used Reagan's "peace through strength" to frame his foreign policy preferences:

If I were president, I would try to be one who says, you know what, I'm a Reagan Conservative. I'm someone who believes in peace through strength, and I would try to lead the country in that way knowing that our goal is peace, and that war is the last resort, not the first resort. And, that when we go to war, we go to war in a constitutional way, which means that we have to vote on it, that war is initiated by congress, not by the president, that we go to war electively.⁸⁷

Besides Paul, Fiorina and Kasich use Reagan as support for military build-up in the face of emerging threats. As an overlap of credibility that the historical problem of presentism, Cruz actually appropriates one of Reagan's ads. In Cruz's ad, he discusses a scorpion in the desert, alluding to the Middle East and the need for American action. This is a spoof on Reagan's "Bear in the woods ad," which alluded to the threat of the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ The differences in the use of Reagan for foreign policy will be examined later.

Aside from foreign policy and the economy, there was also a random collection of miscellaneous policies where candidates could use the Reagan label for credibility. For two quick examples, Kasich uses Reagan to justify Medicaid expansion: "first of all, Megyn, you should know that — that President Reagan expanded Medicaid three or four times."⁸⁹ Secondly, Bush has Reagan weigh in on the Planned Parenthood debate: "Title X of the HHS funding, there is something that was the 'Reagan Rule.' It was passed in 1988...He interpreted it the right way, the courts ruled in his favor, and Planned Parenthood did not get funding during that time until

⁸⁷ Rand Paul in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate."

⁸⁸ Cruz, "Scorpion," *Fox News*, August 11, 2015 in "Campaign Communications- TV and Radio Ads," *P2016 Race for the White House*, <http://www.p2016.org/ads1/paidads.html>

⁸⁹ Kasich in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Primetime Republican Debate."

President Clinton came in.”⁹⁰ As far as salience, the candidates that are making these references do so in such a way that although they are using him for policy purposes, they are not concerned with knowledge of the specific policy details. Therefore, they are presenting these policies into a form more palatable to the general public but still obtaining credibility from those who respect Reagan as an authority.

Credibility of Republican Party

As opposed to individual credibility, Reagan has also been used to promote the credibility of the Republican Party as a whole against the Democratic opponents. Often, Reagan is used as the heroic contrast to President Barack Obama. As Mike Huckabee states, “Ronald Reagan said ‘trust, but verify.’ President Obama is ‘trust, but vilify.’ He trusts our enemies and vilifies everyone who disagrees with him.”⁹¹ Several candidates lament the state of the nation that the Democratic opponents have created and offer up the Republican Party—influenced by Reagan—as the solution. For example, Trump discusses the state of tax reform:

Politicians in Washington have let America fall from the best corporate tax rate in the industrialized world in the 1980’s (thanks to Ronald Reagan) to the worst rate in the industrialized world. That is unacceptable. Under the Trump plan, America will compete with the world and win by cutting the corporate tax rate to 15%, taking our rate from one of the worst to one of the best.⁹²

In addition to taxes and the economy, Paul highlights the credibility of the Republican Party in fixing the United States’ standing in the world. He declared in the first debate, “I’m a Reagan conservative. Reagan did negotiate with the Soviets. But you have to negotiate from a position of strength, and I think President Obama gave away too much, too early.”⁹³ In these cases, the

⁹⁰ Bush in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate.”

⁹¹ Mike Huckabee in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Primetime Republican Debate.”

⁹² Donald Trump, “TRUMP: Make America Great Again,” Campaign Website, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/>

⁹³ Paul in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Primetime Republican Debate.”

candidates were still using Reagan for credibility, but were more concerned with legitimizing Republican leadership in contrast to the current Democratic administration.

Definitely the most prominent rhetorical strategy, Reagan provides a source of credibility for the candidates, at least superficially. It is important to keep in mind that while media does play a fact-checking role on the use of historical figures in modern political discourse, the audience is probably less likely to question the references being made. The audience of the primaries is composed of the most ideological and active wings of the party; wings that no doubt have come to expect this sort of philReaganism. Thus far, Reagan has been used to ascertain credibility as a member of the Republican Party, either by connections or for justification of behavior, for the credibility of specific policies, and for the credibility of the Republican Party to present a legitimate and authoritative challenge to the Democrats. This was the strategy that I anticipated observing as began collecting data, and is reflected in Bednar's scholarship on organizational legacies. Given the role that Reagan has ascended to in the Republican Party, it has almost become a necessary "box" the candidates have to check to remain in good standing with their own party.

Hypothesis 2: Conflicting Ownership

For the most part, the candidates seem to be in agreement about the parts of Reagan's legacy that are public property, as well as how to use them rhetorically and positively. However, there were some instances where the candidates used the same exact moment, event, or policy of Reagan's for different purposes. This idea returns to the possibility of multiple narratives in collective memory, as the same figure can be appropriated by multiple groups, adding new images in addition to the preexisting ones. This is where Jansen's factor of ownership becomes relevant, as the candidates provide their own interpretation of Reagan to serve their own modern

political or ideological purposes. While this was not present nearly as much as I anticipated, there were some differences in the realm of foreign policy, with candidates competing for rightful ownership.

This problem arose mostly in the battle over Reagan's claim to represent "peace through strength." For Bush, he defines this policy as simply the opposite of the weakness that has been fostered by Hillary Clinton and Obama. Bush writes, "Under Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama, we have seen a weakness that now creates huge problems for the next president of the United States. So I'll have a team that will be — that will be following the doctrine I set up, and it will be peace through strength."⁹⁴ But for Paul, that phrase meant taking a less interventionist approach shaped by his libertarian tendencies. On his website it states, "I believe in Ronald Reagan's 'Peace through Strength.' I will continue to stand with Israel and our allies abroad, and I vow to explore all diplomatic options before sending our armed forces into battle."⁹⁵ As far as the battle over the use of "peace through strength," Paul and Bush represent two different usages of the same phrase.

Then there is the related issue of to what extent we should or should not deliberate with our enemies. On the one hand, Paul uses Reagan and his role in the ending of the Cold War as evidence that we should keep talking to even the nations we have poor relations with, such as Russia. Paul argued in the debate, "I think this goes back to essentially what we've been saying for the last two or three questions. Carly Fiorina also said we're not going to talk with Putin. Well, think if Reagan had said that during the Cold War?"⁹⁶ But as his quote suggests, Fiorina uses Reagan's Cold War negotiations as evidence that the United States should not negotiate

⁹⁴ Bush in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate."

⁹⁵ Rand Paul, "Rand Paul for President," Campaign Website, <https://www.randpaul.com/>

⁹⁶ Paul in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate."

with our most established enemies. Fiorina, in a later debate, claimed, “Ronald Reagan walked away at Reykjavik. He walked away, he quit talks, when it was time to quit talking.”⁹⁷ Christie referenced the same moment in a campaign commercial for similar purposes: “I would have walked away from the table. That's what Ronald Reagan did when he walked away from Mikhail Gorbachev at Reykjavik.”⁹⁸ While here he was specifically referencing Iran and not Russia as the nation in question, his and Fiorina’s usage of Reagan holds the same lesson: we should know when not to negotiate with our enemies, which is again opposite of Paul’s usage.

At least in terms of foreign policy, the candidates are fighting for ownership of Reagan’s mantra, “peace through strength.” Through their appropriation, this phrase has simultaneously come to mean building up our military as means of deterrence, searching for other options as opposed to automatically entering conflict, continuing to negotiate with enemies, and knowing when to quit negotiating with enemies. It is also important to note that these discrepancies are as a result of the use of Reagan’s exact words or phrases but in the modern context. There were not nearly as many conflicting uses of Reagan and his own rhetoric as I anticipated—at least not as blatant ones. . In fact, Jansen’s model was not all that helpful at all. The valence was nearly always positive, and the salience was often irrelevant. The candidates used references in a way where the public’s knowledge of Reagan would only have the potential to threaten the candidate’s credibility if they spoke up and challenged him, as in the case of fact-checking. Perhaps more instances of conflicting ownership will emerge as the campaign progresses and candidates begin defining their policies in more detail in an effort to differentiate themselves from each other.

⁹⁷ Fiorina in “Republican debate transcript: primetime debate on economy.”

⁹⁸ Christie, “Protect America” *Fox News*, July 24, 2015, in “Campaign Communications- TV and Radio Ads,” *P2016 Race for the White House*, <http://www.p2016.org/ads1/paidads.html>

Hypothesis 3: The Symbolism-Policy Divide

As some of the previous examples indicate, there were some candidates who seem to drop Reagan's name whenever they can for no real purpose other than to remind the audience that they are Republican and bolster their credibility. For example, consider Bush's two random comments in the debates. One, he remarked that for a new figure on the ten dollar bill, he "would go with Ronald Reagan's partner, Margaret Thatcher. Probably illegal, but what the heck?"⁹⁹ And two, a side comment in a story unrelated to Reagan completely, "Reagan Love — by the way, pretty great name, I think — is a teacher."¹⁰⁰ In contrast to this inconsistency and arbitrariness, a couple of candidates were surprisingly consistent with their references across all of the debates and other forms of campaign material. Specifically, Marco Rubio and Rand Paul consistently used Reagan for the same purposes throughout their campaigns. For Paul, he primarily uses Reagan to advocate for a less-aggressive foreign policy and economic growth—two policy-driven issues. And for Rubio, in contrast to the more policy and ideologically specific usage, he is consistent in his purely symbolic references to Reagan's optimism and patriotism. A comparison of the two provides lessons for the pitfalls of using historical figures in modern political discourse, as well as a model for how we ideally should want candidates to do so.

Paul: Foreign and Economic Policy

From the very beginning of his campaign, in his very announcement, Paul associated his foreign policy with "peace through strength." In his announcement he declared, "I envision a national defense that promotes, as Reagan put it, peace through strength. I believe in applying Reagan's approach to foreign policy to the Iran issue. Successful negotiations with untrustworthy

⁹⁹ Bush in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate."

¹⁰⁰ Bush in "Republican debate transcript: primetime debate on economy."

adversaries are only achieved from a position of strength.”¹⁰¹ From that point on, he has repeated this similar rhetoric in all of the debates as well as his book, *Taking a Stand*. For an example in his book, Paul reaffirmed, “I’m also a man of peace through strength. I believe the defense of our country is a president’s first priority. I grew up a Reagan Republican and believe that an unparalleled national defense is the greatest deterrent to war.”¹⁰² Paul is very consistent in his use of “peace through strength” to relate to less intervention, negotiation and strength. But as mentioned previously, Paul’s use differs greatly from his fellow candidates, due to the libertarian streak in his ideology.

He also uses Reagan in reference to the economy. Yet, as a disclaimer, he has not done so yet in the public forum, and only does so in his written materials. He references Reagan for both specifics and general economic goals. For specifics, Paul notes that he has created a tax plan in cooperation with former Reagan advisors:

My tax plan would blow up the tax code and start over. In consultation with some of the top tax experts in the country, including the Heritage Foundation’s Stephen Moore, former presidential candidate Steve Forbes and Reagan economist Arthur Laffer, I devised a 21st-century tax code that would establish a 14.5% flat-rate tax applied equally to all personal income, including wages, salaries, dividends, capital gains, rents and interest.¹⁰³

For the more general, Paul aligns his aspirations for the economy with the growth under Reagan. For example he writes, “The federal government will get smaller so the private sector can grow larger, and we’ll grow the economy like never before. We will, like President Reagan before us, create millions of jobs by dramatically lowering taxes and reducing the size and scope of

¹⁰¹ Rand Paul, “Transcript: Read Full Text of Sen. Rand Paul’s Campaign Launch,” *Time*, April 7, 2015, <http://time.com/3773964/rand-paul-presidential-campaign-launch-speech-transcript/>

¹⁰² Rand Paul, *Taking A Stand: Moving Beyond Partisan Politics to Unite America* (New York: Center Street, 2015), 9

¹⁰³ Paul in “Transcript: Read Full Text of Sen. Rand Paul’s Campaign Launch.”

government.”¹⁰⁴ Nearly all of Paul’s references are either in relation to foreign policy or the economy, and even then, he uses them more for the basis of his own policy than symbolism.

Rubio: Symbolism, Patriotism, and Optimism

In complete contrast to Paul’s exclusive policy use, Rubio uses Reagan for his symbolic power and mythos. For one, he uses Reagan as source of patriotism. Similar to what Reagan himself said was his greatest accomplishment, Rubio defines Reagan in the following way: “I’m honored to be here at the Reagan Library, at a place that honors the legacy of a man who inspired not just my interest in public service, but also our love for country.”¹⁰⁵ In the same debate, Rubio summarized what he believes Reagan represents and means to the nation as a whole:

One of the things that made Ronald Reagan a great president, is that he understood that America was a unique nation, unlike any other that had existed throughout human history. He knew it was founded on universal principles that were powerful, the dignity of all people, human rights, the rights of all to live in freedom and liberty, and choose their own path in life.¹⁰⁶

Rubio’s rhetoric mirrors Reagan’s own words and attempts to self-eulogize before death, as discussed by Kiewe. In Rubio’s usage, what made Reagan great was not any specific policy or action he undertook as president, but what he represented: patriotism, optimism, and American exceptionalism.

In fact, Rubio’s entire campaign has been framed under the term a “New American Century,” evoking a sense of opportunity and rejuvenation. As far as the origins of the term, “American Century,” that is a phrase Reagan himself used in his speech to the 1992 Republican National Convention in support of George H.W. Bush. Reagan said,

I have not only seen, but lived the marvels of what historians have called the "American Century." Yet, tonight is not a time to look backward. For while I take inspiration from

¹⁰⁴ Paul, *Taking A Stand: Moving Beyond Partisan Politics to Unite America*, 165.

¹⁰⁵ Rubio in “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate.”

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

the past, like most Americans, I live for the future. So this evening, for just a few minutes, I hope you will let me talk about a country that is forever young.¹⁰⁷

In every debate thus far, Rubio has used similar rhetoric regarding the confluence of the American dream, opportunity, and his New American Century. For example, in the third debate he declared, “Our greatest days lie ahead if we are willing to do what it takes now. If we're willing to do what it takes now, the 21st century is going to be the new American century, greater than any other era we've had in the history of this great nation.”¹⁰⁸ In regard to the importance of progress and innovation, Rubio himself said in his announcement:

This election is a generational choice about what kind of country we will be. And before us now is the opportunity to author the greatest chapter yet, in the amazing story of America. But we can't do that by going back to the leaders and the ideas of the past. We must change the decisions we are making by changing the people who are making them.¹⁰⁹

Rubio is not aiming to return America to the nostalgic days of Reagan, but using Reagan's trademark optimism, evoking his symbolism in his efforts to make America even better than it was before. Although less blatant than Trump's theft of “let's make America great again,” Rubio is presenting his entire campaign vision through the lens of Reagan's symbolism.

Rubio is by no means the only candidate using Reagan's symbolism, however. For example, Cruz closed out the fourth debate as follows: “I believe that 2016 will be an election like 1980, that we will win by following Reagan's admonition to paint in bold colors, not pale pastels. We're building a grassroots army. I ask you to join us at tedcruz.org. And we, the people, can turn this nation around.”¹¹⁰ Here he is referencing Reagan's general leadership, more similar

¹⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, “1992 Republican National Convention,” *Federalism and the new Conservatism*, http://reagan2020.us/speeches/RNC_Convention.asp

¹⁰⁸ Rubio in “The third Republican debate transcript, annotated.”

¹⁰⁹ Marco Rubio, “Full text of Marco Rubio's 2016 presidential campaign announcement,” *The Washington Post*, April 13, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/04/13/full-text-of-marco-rubios-2016-presidential-campaign-announcement/>

¹¹⁰ Cruz in “Republican debate transcript: primetime debate on economy.”

to symbolism than any particular policies. Kasich even adopts a key concept from Reagan's presidency, one that is actually from John Winthrop's "City Upon A Hill" speech. Kasich remarked, "By the way, I think I actually flew on this plane with Ronald Reagan when I was a congressman, and his goals, and mine, really much—are pretty much the same. Lift Americans, unify, give hope, grow America, and restore it is to that great, shining city on a hill."¹¹¹ But what is important is that these are exceptions; not the rule. Rubio is the only one to consistently use this symbolism as a part of his strategy as opposed to in random, unconnected ways. These examples are also more blatantly in reference to Reagan than Rubio's usage, which often does not include mentioning Reagan by name.

Rubio's consistency is in his purely symbolic usage of Ronald Reagan. In contrast, Paul is very policy driven in his use of Reagan, something that we have already seen has led to partisan warfare, contested ownership, and historical presentism. But what is also important to consider is how policy usages misrecognize the nature of Ronald Reagan's collective memory as he envisioned and crafted it. This passage, from Reagan's Farewell Address, encapsulates the symbolism that has come to be deeply intertwined with his collective memory:

My fondest hope for each one of you— and especially for the young people here— is that you will love your country, not for her power or wealth, but for her selflessness and her idealism. May each of you have the heart to conceive, the understanding to direct, and the hand to execute works that will make the world a little better for you having been here. May all of you as Americans never forget your heroic origins, never fail to seek divine guidance, and never lose your natural, Godgiven optimism. And finally, my fellow Americans, may every dawn be a great new beginning for America, and every evening bring us closer to that shining city upon a hill.¹¹²

As we are familiar with by now, Reagan emphasizes his patriotism, optimism, and belief in American exceptionalism. In summarizing Reagan's rhetoric and myth, Gould writes "It was

¹¹¹ Kasich in "Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Second Republican Debate."

¹¹² Ronald Reagan, in Kiewe "Framing Memory through Eulogy: Ronald Reagan's Long Good-bye," 260.

vintage Reagan—broad, thematic, uplifting, and evocative of Republican themes.”¹¹³ Perhaps the same thing could be said about Rubio.

CONCLUSION: The Political Use of Symbolism

What are the costs of the candidates misusing Reagan’s symbolism for policy purposes? In some situations, Reagan’s symbolism or policies have been appropriated and applied to specific policies beyond their original intentions or purpose. Reagan’s other son, Michael Reagan, noted this issue with the use of Reagan by modern candidates. He said in an interview, “Every one of them mentioned my father in one way or another, and it’s interesting to see how many of them, and how many of the people out there that they’re speaking to recreate my father in *their* image and likeness instead of his.”¹¹⁴ In other words, they are not evoking Reagan for who he was or what he represented, they are using him for their own utility. While this practice—known as presentism—provides for poor historical thinking, but is a good source of instant credibility with the Republican base.

Aside from the historical and political problems with the use of historical figures as mentioned above, there is an argument to be made regarding the notion of progress and innovation. As far as using Reagan as their benchmark for credibility, again, Michael Reagan argues that the prevalent use of his father in modern rhetoric may actually prohibit the Republican Party from being able to appeal to younger populations:

Republicans can pull up my father and talk about Ronald Reagan but they’re talking to an aging population within their own party. They’ve got to find a way to relate to the younger generation and who *they* are, and if they’re not relatable or likable to those 30, 32, 35 and 40 year-olds, then they find themselves in a lot of trouble. So the party can

¹¹³ Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans*, 411

¹¹⁴ Michael Reagan in “‘Look in the Mirror, Fat Boy’: Ronald Reagan’s Sons Discuss Donald Trump and 2016.”

reach out and co-opt my father, but it remains an old party. The Grand *Old* Party. If they want to win, they have to find a way to relate to the Grand Younger Party.¹¹⁵

While political scientists are quick to jump on the “adapt-or-die” bandwagon, for example see Ruy Teixeira, I am hesitant to make any claims about the overall significance of Ronald Reagan references on Republican success. However, there is a case to be made in terms of the potential pitfalls of continuing to use a figure from the 1980’s as the source of credibility.

This practice also has implications for the Republican candidates as followers, as they are continuing to hold up Reagan while threatening the legitimacy of the interim Republican leaders. For the majority of this paper I treated and considered these Republican candidates as leaders of their own party and ultimately the leading voices in charge of shaping Reagan’s collective memory. However, we must also consider how these Republicans are behaving as followers of their chosen leader. The fact that they are continuously following a deceased leader from the 1980’s may suggest that they are being *dishonorable followers*.¹¹⁶ For one, since the leader is deceased, the Republican candidates continuing to follow him are now taking his words out of his context and appropriating him to suit their own purposes. And two, what about the fact that they are being disloyal to the current and intermediate leaders since Reagan, such as either Bush? These may only be problems within the realm of followership studies, and are not problematic to the majority of the American public viewing the campaign.

The majority of candidates are relying on Reagan for credibility and formation of their policy platforms. Most of the candidates do so in a random manner, more concerned with instant credibility as a Republican than using Reagan as an incorporated part of their campaign strategy.

¹¹⁵ Michael Reagan in Ralph, “‘Look in the Mirror, Fat Boy’: Ronald Reagan’s Sons Discuss Donald Trump and 2016.”

¹¹⁶ Credit to Jeffrey Matthews of the University of Puget Sound who is currently working on a book on the followership of Colin Powell.

As demonstrated by my observations in the data, this lack of coherence and the prevalent emphasis on policy can result in problems for the candidates both from the perspective of good historical thinking and campaign strategy. As far as historical problems, they are removing Reagan from his original context and attempting to update decades-old policy to modern problems, misconstruing his intentions and purpose and distorting the reality of the man himself. As far as political problems, using Reagan for concrete purposes can result in divisions among the party on ideological lines and conflicting ownership of his policy legacy, can invite fact-checking and criticism from the media and opposition regarding those references,¹¹⁷ and can fail to appeal to audiences who are not accustomed to hearing Reagan used in such a way, seeing as policy uses are outside of the accepted territory of Reagan's collective memory.

Symbolism, unlike policy, can transcend times and contexts to be applicable and adaptable to our own times. The other quality of policy that symbolism overcomes is the threat of division, as Bednar shows that symbols are points of consensus among organizations. While candidates can disagree on policy legacies and specifics, it is much more difficult to dispute, fact-check, or misunderstand symbolic invocations. Political science also supports the notion that it is better for candidates to keep their rhetoric simple—symbolic—as opposed to complicated—policy-specific. Doherty explains: “Candidates are motivated to remain ambiguous about their policy positions. Value cues offer a way for them to communicate “big picture” ideas that have broad appeal. The public benefits from these cues in that they offer a shortcut for political judgments.”¹¹⁸ In fact, as already discussed, Reagan's myth was constructed of this ambiguous

¹¹⁷ Ted Cruz especially has been challenged in the media regarding his use of Ronald Reagan. For example see: Christopher Hooks, “Ted Cruz Still Thinks He’s Ronald Reagan. He’s Still Wrong,” *Texas Observer*, October 27, 2015, <https://www.texasobserver.org/ted-cruz-still-thinks-hes-ronald-reagan-hes-still-wrong/>. See also: Ed Mazza, “Stephen Colbert Calls Out Ted Cruz On Ronald Reagan’s Legacy,” *Huffington Post Politics*, September 22, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stephen-colbert-ted-cruz_5600e28fe4b08820d919fbd1

¹¹⁸ David Doherty, “Presidential Rhetoric, Candidate Evaluations, and Party Identification,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 61, N. 3 (2008), 420-421.

symbolism. Again, while it is difficult to make an argument about whether the use of Reagan will have any bearing on electoral success, it is interesting that the majority of the candidates are using rhetoric that is potentially divisive, as opposed to the vague symbolism that would allow audiences to form their own judgments and supply their own interpretations of said symbolism.

Only one candidate, Rubio, is consistently using Reagan's collective memory for what it is: symbolism. Rubio does not attempt to convert the abstract into the concrete, but instead uses Reagan for the values he has come to represent, such as optimism, patriotism, and American exceptionalism. By remaining within the realm of Reagan's accepted collective memory, as well as relying on the very legacy that Reagan himself helped to craft, Rubio alleviates himself from the historical and political problems that the other candidates are facing. By using abstracts such as patriotism, Rubio does not trap himself into being anachronistic or presentist in his usage. By remaining purposefully vague, Rubio protects himself from the pitfalls of attempting to use outdated policy for modern day concerns. Instead he is associating himself with what Reagan represented, not any specific action he took or policy he endorsed. If our question is who is the most Reaganesque, Rubio's actions thus far demonstrate the clearest understanding that being Reaganesque is more about the embodying the symbolic and abstract than it is resurrecting an economic platform or foreign policy from the 1980's.

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