

GEORGE W. BUSH NEEDS TO FOLLOW REAGAN'S EXAMPLE

Ronald Reagan made me proud to be an American. He truly believed in the greatness of America, and he convinced the rest of us to feel the same way. God only knows where this country would be today had we not had the good sense to elect him president in 1980. President Jimmy Carter made the term "malaise" a byword during his one term, and for good reason. The country was still deeply divided over Vietnam. Iran was holding a group of American citizens hostage. Fuel costs were high. Interest rates were higher. Jimmy Carter made us feel as though our problems were insurmountable. He was about as inspiring as a tree stump.

Ronald Reagan came into the presidency with a vision of what America could be and should be, and he never wavered. He called the Soviet Union an "evil empire". When he did so, the uproar from the media and Democrats was not unlike the hyperventilating when George W. Bush declared Iraq, Iran and North Korea an "axis of evil." Reagan didn't back down. He helped to engineer the fall of the Soviet Union because he knew that communism was a bad idea under any circumstance, but particularly when compared to his beloved democracy.

The story has been told many times that his advisors tried in vain to have him not include in a speech the line in which he told Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev to "tear down this Wall" in Berlin. It would be insulting to Gorbachev and would set back negotiations. Reagan is said to have heard everybody out and then reminded them who was president of the United States and who wasn't. It was his decision to make and he made it. He wanted Gorbachev to tear down the Wall. The rest is history. The Berlin Wall came down and with it, the Soviet Union. Ronald Reagan had ended the Cold War and made the United States the world's lone superpower.

Only two presidents in my lifetime — John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan — have had a visceral connection to the American public that transcended political philosophies. They were two completely different men, but both touched Americans in a very personal way. Harry Truman (my all-time favorite) didn't do it, nor did Dwight Eisenhower, nor Lyndon Johnson, nor Richard Nixon (at least not in a positive way), certainly not Jimmy Carter, nor did George Bush I. Bill Clinton could have, but he had no moral compass.

George W. Bush shares much of the same philosophy as Ronald Reagan. Bush is convinced — as I am — that the United States cannot contain terrorism. We must attack Islamic terrorists and destroy them first, or they will destroy us later. The difference between the two men is that Bush has not yet shown the ability to touch the American people to the degree that Reagan did. Leaders lead, but great leaders inspire those they lead to expect great things. Granted, the national media is overwhelmingly stacked against Bush, but it was stacked against Ronald Reagan, too. It didn't matter. Reagan went around them and over them and straight to the hearts of the American people, and they loved him for it. George Bush needs to do the same thing.

Too many people in the White House are trying to manage our current president as if they are marketing a box of detergent. Too many people worried about media polls and popularity ratings. As a result, his speeches are dull and vapid and disappointing. George Bush needs to forego the sanitized pap he is being fed and talk to us from his heart. He needs to articulate his vision of America's future, and like an impassioned football coach he needs to fire us up to help him execute that vision.

Because of Ronald Reagan, there is no Cold War and no more Soviet Union. I hope one day we can say that because of George W. Bush, there is no more terrorism. Whether we do or not will depend on how well he can inspire the American public. He has his work cut out for him.