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## Reagan's Monument

"Reagan in Retrospect" by A. James Reichley, in *The World & I* (May 1994), 3400 New York Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

First critics of Ronald Reagan's presidency dismissed him as an affable buffoon. Then, when the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were liberated, they denied that the Reagan administration and its budget-busting arms buildup played a crucial role. Finally, a few academics conceded that the administration's policies contributed, but denied that Reagan himself did. Once again, Reagan's critics are mistaken, contends Reichley, a former Brookings Institution researcher who is now a Visiting Fellow at Georgetown University.

Reagan may have been ill informed about many things; his attention may sometimes have wandered; he may not have chosen some of his subordinates wisely. "But the image of Reagan as a mere front for others will not stand," Reichley says. "Both the overall ideological direction of the Reagan administration and decisions on most major issues came from the president himself."

Although he was the most "ideological" president since Herbert Hoover, he "was generally able to avoid the rigidity" that trapped Hoover. In negotiations, Reagan's practice was to hold firm until the last moment—and then make a deal. "His success in foreign policy came largely from this trait," Reichley believes. At the Reykjavik summit in 1986, instead of ratifying prearranged agreements, Reagan entered into freewheeling negotiations with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Pundits were aghast—but Reagan laid the groundwork for the major arms-control agreement of 1987.

"Far from being the puppet of master manipulators within his administration," Reichley says, "Reagan often, for better or worse, made key decisions that were opposed by most of his advisers." He insisted in 1982 on sticking with both a tax cut and a defense buildup, and later he stubbornly pushed ahead with the Strategic Defense Initiative. Sometimes—as when in 1985 he overruled the secretaries of state and defense to go ahead with the sale of arms to Iran—Reagan made bad decisions. But *he* made them. Even in the Iran-Contra affair, Reichley says, it eventually became clear "that whether or not Reagan was aware of exactly how funds were

being channeled to the Contras, the overall policy being pursued was his."

The "returns" are not all in yet on the effects of the Reagan administration's domestic policies. But victory in the Cold War, Reichley says, "should be monument enough for any man."

## City of Smiles

"Washington's Nice Problem" by David Segal, in *The Washington Monthly* (Sept. 1994), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

"If you want a friend in Washington," Harry Truman is supposed to have said, "bring a dog." More recently, Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan is quoted by reporter Bob Woodward in his best seller, *The Agenda* (1994), as saying: "This is a town that is full of evil people. If you can't deal with every day having people try to destroy you, you shouldn't even think of coming down here." But the misanthropes have it all wrong, insists Segal, an editor at the *Washington Monthly*: "The truth is, Washington is a nice town filled with nice people being nice to each other." In fact, Segal believes, niceness is one of the big problems of modern government.

Most of Washington's "players" (as those brimming with enthusiasm for the great game of government are wont to describe the influential and near-influential) come to town for particular jobs. Since these are not lifetime positions, the politicians, political appointees, and their many invaluable aides are "always facing the prospect of looking elsewhere for work—or going home." And after they have been in Washington for a while, and had the experience of working on "important issues" with "important people," they frequently do not want to go home. What to do? Make friends, make contacts—and make nice to anyone who might be useful to you. Not all the relationships are fake, either, Segal points out. Many Washingtonians who knew Representative Dan Rostenkowski (D.-Ill.) felt genuine sadness for him earlier this year when he was indicted on 17 charges of defrauding the public and had to quit his House Ways and Means Committee chairmanship.

The trouble with all the collective chummi-