# United States History Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Unit 13 Evaluating Reagan Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

President Reagan’s legacy remains highly contested. A number of Americans remember his presidency fondly, cherishing his optimism, his tough-talking stance against the Soviets, and his abundant confidence in the promise of America. Scholars have been more critical, accusing Reagan of being more image than substance, of increasing income inequality, and of gross incompetence in running the executive branch. Using the following data, you decide: what grade does Ronald Reagan get?

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| **PRO: Reagan was a good president.** | **CON: Reagan was a poor president.** |
| Character  * Charming * “The Great Communicator” * Restored confidence in the presidency | Character  * Played the role of a president (“actor”) * Speeches show little depth of intellect * Hands-off leadership led to scandal |
| Crime  * Supported 8 executive orders against crime * Launched a War on Drugs | Crime  * Violent crime increased 21% 1981-1989 * War on drugs failed to stop drug epidemic |
| National Defense/Foreign Policy  * Increased defense spending * Challenged the Soviet Union * Encouraged “freedom fighters” in Nicaragua | National Defense/Foreign Policy  * Wasted money on “Star Wars” * Soviets were already weakening * “freedom fighters” were funded illegally by arms sales to Iran (Iran-Contra affair) |
| Economy  * Economic boom from 1982 to 1990 | Economy  * Nation constantly ran a budget deficit |
| Environment  * Signed more wilderness protection bills than any president since 1964 | Environment  * Once said that “trees cause more pollution than automobiles do”; opened federal lands for oil, gas, and coal companies |
| Labor  * Discouraged strikes, which hurt national productivity (especially among public service employees) | Labor  * Fired the striking Air Traffic Controllers in 1981 (12,176 of them) and increased public dislike for labor unions |
| Poverty  * In 1988 he signed an act to encourage states to create job skills training programs * Tax cuts helped to increase investment by freeing up income | Poverty  * Cut welfare programs from federal budgets (food stamps and housing); Poverty rate increased from 12% to 15% * Tax cuts for the rich (Reaganomics) helped increase income inequality |
| Civil Rights  * No positive steps taken for civil rights for African-Americans * Appointed the first woman to the Supreme Court, Sandra Day O’Connor | Civil Rights  * Opposed affirmative action, extending provisions of the Voting Rights Act (of 1965), and supported the racist apartheid regime in South Africa |

**Questions to Consider:**

1. When ranking a president as good or bad, what issues matter most? Should you be more concerned about a president’s domestic policies or foreign policies? Or weigh both equally?

2. Do some issues matter more than others? Should a president be ranked poorly because of his environmental policy or should issues like the economy be more important?

3. What do you think the majority of Americans care about the most when evaluating a president?

4. How important is it that a president “looks like a president”? Do you think that a president should be charming, polished, and gifted as a speaker? How important is image?

5. How much responsibility does a president bear for actions that his subordinates carry out? In the Iran-Contra affair, Reagan claimed to not know what his subordinates were doing. How responsible is Reagan for their behavior?

6. What overall grade (A-B-C-D-E-F) would you give Reagan? Why?