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## Ronald Reagan and The New Conservative Populism

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It has long been the conventional wisdom that Ronald Reagan was an unusually effective rhetorical leader. Dubbed the “Great Communicator,” Reagan has been praised by both journalists and academic observers for his popular leadership skills. Yet despite this general agreement about Reagan’s skills, there is less of a consensus on the nature and significance of his rhetorical leadership. To some, Reagan’s rhetoric was marked by consensual appeals that unified the nation as a whole. For instance, Robert Dallek depicts him as a “soft sell” spokesman; Bert Rockman notes how Reagan used “dulcet tones” to mask the sweeping changes in government he was proposing; and Thomas Cronin remarks how Reagan resembles a Mr. Rogers, a president who explains policy in a “neighborly way.”<sup>1</sup> To others, Reagan represents a populist agitator. Michael Kazin, in his book, *The Populist Persuasion*, characterizes Reagan’s leadership as the culmination of the conservative capture of populism that began with Richard Nixon. In Kazin’s view, Reagan drew upon the populist language coined in the nineteenth century by dramatically reinterpreting the meaning of the people and the special interests to fit his conservative agenda.<sup>2</sup> Journalists and even one of Reagan’s speechwriters also highlight the populist tropes of the 40th president, depicting him as an Andrew Jackson of the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

This paper attempts to gauge the validity of these contrasting claims by tracing the development of Reagan’s rhetoric from his early forays into political activism through his presidency, and by comparing Reagan’s use of populism to his immediate predecessors and successors. Reagan’s populism emerged before his adoption of the conservative agenda of rolling back the national government. Campaigning for Harry Truman in 1948, Reagan attacked corporate greed, defended the common man, and attacked the Republican Congress for tax cuts that he and other Democrats charged were skewed toward the wealthy. With his conversion to conservatism in the 1950s and early 1960s, Reagan successfully adapted the Democrats’ populist imagery to his much different political agenda. The national government replaced greedy corporations as the enemy of ordinary Americans, yet the structure of the appeal remained much the same.

But Reagan also came to recognize the political risks posed by the populist jeremiad, and he consciously strove to create a more balanced rhetoric that defused charges of extremism. The bifurcated image of our fortieth president as both a populist crusader and a soft-sell spokesman is a reflection of a strategy of specialization in which Reagan adopted populism when addressing campaign and narrower audiences, but in which he emphasized more consensual themes in his major addresses to nationwide audiences. It is also noteworthy that Reagan generally reserved his populist appeals for a limited set of issues—mostly relating to fiscal and tax policy—rather than adopting such rhetoric when dealing with potentially explosive social and cultural issues. I conclude by challenging the notion that Reagan’s legacy encompasses the conservative capture of populist rhetoric. Instead, Reagan’s Republican successors have made only limited use of populism in their major addresses to the nation.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Development of Reagan’s Populism

Reagan’s rhetorical approach as president has its roots in each of the two main phases of his political life: the liberal Democratic phase that spanned his early support of Franklin Delano Roosevelt through to the early 1950s and the more enduring conservative phase that marked Reagan’s thinking throughout his career as an elected official. As a liberal Democrat, Reagan drew upon the Democratic tradition of populist appeals, adopting the themes of the citizen politician and class conflict in his own speeches. During Reagan’s conservative phase, he shifted targets but the populist form remained intact. Both the liberal and conservative phases thus played important roles in the shaping of Reagan’s presidential rhetoric.

The Reagan of 1948 differed dramatically from the Reagan of 1980. After World War II ended, Reagan seemed particularly eager to establish his liberal credentials. In his own words, he was a “near-hopeless hemophilic liberal.”<sup>5</sup> He joined several groups having to do with humanitarian or liberal causes: the Americans for Democratic Action, the liberal

American Veterans Committee, the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions (HICCASP), and briefly the World Federalists.<sup>6</sup> In fall 1948, Reagan campaigned for Hubert Humphrey for Senate and for Harry Truman for president. During the campaign, Reagan adopted populist themes that echoed Truman's fiery rhetoric. In a radio speech sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Reagan made a strong populist case for electing Truman over the Republican Thomas Dewey. He started off the broadcast by introducing himself as a concerned citizen:

This is Ronald Reagan. You may know me as a motion picture actor. But tonight I am just a citizen concerned about the national election next month and more than a little impatient with those promises Republicans made before they got control of Congress a couple of years ago.<sup>7</sup>

Reagan noted that Republicans had promised in the 1946 campaign to help boost the incomes of all citizens, but he charged that instead, "the profits of corporations have doubled while workers wages have increased by only a quarter ... The small increase workers did receive was more than eaten up by rising prices." To emphasize the linkages between high corporate profits, Republican economic policies, and the suffering of ordinary Americans, Reagan contrasted the story of Smith L. Carpenter with that of Standard Oil of New Jersey. Carpenter was a ninety-one year old retiree who had to return to work because he "didn't figure on this Republican inflation, which ate up all of his savings." Reagan asked his listeners to "take as a contrast the Standard Oil of New Jersey, which reported a net profit of \$210 million after taxes for the first half of 1948, an increase of 70% in one year. In other words, high prices have not been caused by higher wages, but by bigger and bigger profits."

Reagan ended his broadcast by lambasting the Republican Congress for the "vicious" Taft-Hartley law that had "handcuffed" the labor unions, for the Gearhart bill which had "snatched away" Social Security benefits from nearly a million workers, and for passing a

tax cut bill that would “benefit the higher income brackets alone; the average worker saved only \$1.73 a week.”

These passages underscore several elements of Reagan’s rhetorical approach that would endure throughout his career, even as the specific targets of his populist appeals shifted with his political ideology. In the first passage, Reagan painted himself as an average citizen as opposed to a Hollywood actor. Reagan’s use of the idea of the citizen politician fit well with Truman’s depiction of himself as a Washington outsider. Notwithstanding his position as an incumbent president, Truman emphasized his citizen politician status in the 1948 campaign. In a public explanation of why he was running for office in 1948, Truman noted how he would have been “content to stay entirely clear of the White House” if it were not for the threat of a reversal of New Deal reforms by “reactionaries.”<sup>8</sup> Later on in his administration, Truman remarked that he was just an “ordinary citizen of this great Republic of ours who has the greatest responsibility in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

The idea of the citizen politician proved useful to Reagan throughout his political career. It not only defused charges that his years as an actor were inadequate preparation for governing, it also folded into the populist trope of the outsider fighting for the people against a corrupt political establishment. When presented with his gubernatorial rival’s extensive record of governing experience and accused of not having any experience for the job, Reagan quipped, “The man who currently has the job has more experience than anybody. That’s why I am running.”<sup>10</sup> In his 1970 reelection bid for governor of California, Reagan campaigned as “a citizen temporarily in public service.”<sup>11</sup> Years later, in his farewell address as president, Reagan explained his motivations for seeking political office: “Back in the 1960s, when I began, it seemed to me that we’d begun reversing the order of things--that through more and more rules and regulations and confiscatory taxes, the government was taking more of our

money, more of our options, and more of our freedom. I went into politics in part to put up my hand and say, "Stop." I was a citizen politician, and it seemed the right thing for a citizen to do."<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps even more striking than Reagan's framing of himself as a citizen politician is Reagan's use of a populist jeremiad that sets the average American worker against greedy corporations and their servants in Congress. In doing so, Reagan taps into an old Democratic theme going back to Andrew Jackson and other nineteenth century Democrats, one that was expressed intermittently by Franklin Roosevelt and that was brandished routinely by Truman.<sup>13</sup> Just as Democrat Andrew Jackson had attacked the Second Bank of the United States for making the "rich richer and the potent more powerful," Reagan laid out the argument that greedy corporations and their Republican allies were responsible for inflation that robbed ordinary Americans of their savings.<sup>14</sup> Though Reagan's beliefs about the causes of inflation changed dramatically as he moved to the right, he retained the same basic populist sense that politics was largely a struggle between ordinary Americans and a self-serving elite.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the 1948 campaign speech also exhibited Reagan's belief that the job of a political leader is to restore fundamental values. By electing Truman, voters could prevent Republicans from eviscerating the liberal state and could instead safeguard the New Deal's accomplishments in bringing social justice to workers and retirees. Even as his political views changed, Reagan retained this understanding of executive leadership as an instrument that can be used to reinstate a just order that had been threatened by the depredations of special interests that had gotten a hold of state power.

As has been well-documented by numerous scholars and journalists, Reagan's political views shifted in the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> As late as November 1950, Reagan campaigned for

Helen Gahagan Douglas, the liberal representative who was contesting Richard Nixon for the Senate seat from California. Less than a year later, Reagan addressed the Kiwanis International Convention in St. Louis in 1951, criticizing the national government for heaping undue taxes on motion picture industry workers. He warned the “average citizen” that if “they [the federal government] can get away with it there [Hollywood], it is aimed at your pocketbook and you are next.”<sup>17</sup> In a collection of speeches published after his presidency, Reagan labeled this speech his “basic Hollywood Speech” and noted how it created the foundation for future speeches about governmental abuses. Where his 1948 radio address for Truman had depicted tax battles as a distributional fight between high-income individuals and ordinary workers, Reagan in the 1950s instead emphasized the conflict between all taxpayers and a greedy federal government.

Reagan vigorously polished these conservative populist themes during his stint as the spokesperson for General Electric from 1954-1962. During this time, Reagan hosted the television program, GE Theatre, and toured the country as the company’s “good will ambassador” traveling to over 135 General Electric plants across 38 states delivering what would become his basic political stump speech. He also became a popular speaker at rotary clubs, Chamber of Commerce dinners, and national conventions. As described by Lou Cannon, “the script that emerged from this corporate-sponsored odyssey was patriotic, antigovernment, anticommunist, and probusiness.”<sup>18</sup> Touring America also brought Reagan closer to middle America. As Reagan told Edward Langley: “When I went on those tours and shook hands with all of those people, I began to see that they were very different people than the people Hollywood was talking about. I was seeing the same people that I grew up with in Dixon, Illinois. I realized I was living in a tinsel factory. And this exposure brought me back.”<sup>19</sup> In his biography, he tells how “he’d listen and they’d cite examples of



government interference and snafus and complain how bureaucrats, through overregulation, were telling them how to run their businesses.”<sup>20</sup> Gradually, Reagan shortened the part of his speech that focused on the mistreatment of Hollywood actors and spent more time “beating the bushes for free enterprise” and warning people about the “threat of government.”<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, Reagan was regularly pointing out to people the threat of communism “in their own backyards.”<sup>22</sup> In a 1959 speech entitled “Business, Ballots, and Bureaus,” Reagan sounded many of the same themes that he would draw upon as president. He assailed big government programs, including attempts to “socialize medicine,” the progressive income tax, and even Social Security. He complained about the growing complexity of the tax code, noting how it had increased from “thirty-one words to four hundred and forty thousand words.” And he criticized the permanent bureaucracy that was “beyond the reach of any ballot.” But this speech is noteworthy in that it goes much further than Reagan’s speeches as president in identifying the socialist threat as both an external and internal enemy. Reagan noted that in many cases people in government were well-meaning, but “aren’t we justified in suspecting that there are those who have fostered the growth of government by deliberate intent and design?” As a consequence of the strong antigovernment messages employed in speeches like Business, Ballots, and Bureaus, Reagan acquired a reputation among Democratic and labor groups for being a “right-wing extremist” and threatened to spoil GE’s image as a middle-of-the-road company. In 1962, General Electric cancelled GE Theatre because of falling ratings and concerns that Reagan was becoming too controversial to be its spokesperson.<sup>23</sup>

The cancellation of his contract with GE did not temper Reagan’s political oratory. Indeed, two years later Reagan cemented his image as an outspoken opponent of big government with a speech given on behalf of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, later

dubbed “A Time for Choosing.” This speech did not break new ground for Reagan, but rather drew upon the same themes that he had developed in the 1950s, though with new statistics and folk stories to illustrate his argument. In “the Speech,” as his advisers referred to it, Reagan attacked a long litany of government programs: Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Farm Aid, the disadvantaged youth program, urban renewal programs, the progressive income tax, and Social Security. Reagan’s attacks on these governmental programs highlighted three central themes that would form the core of his conservative populism. He attacked big government for its cost and waste of the taxpayer’s money. He lambasted the Democratic Party for pushing the country “down the road under the banners of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.” Finally, he criticized the “little intellectual elite,” the “do-gooders,” and the “government planners” who advocated the creation of a welfare state that stripped citizens of their freedom.<sup>24</sup> David Broder exclaimed that Reagan’s 1964 speech was “the most successful debut since William Jennings Bryan electrified the 1896 Democratic convention with his “Cross of Gold’ speech.”<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, after Lyndon Johnson’s landslide victory over Goldwater, Reagan was one of many Republicans to reconsider the nature of their appeals to the public. In December 1964, Reagan issued an alert to the Republican community in the *National Review*. He cautioned conservatives to moderate their rhetoric--without sacrificing their policy principles--in order to counter the radical image that the Republican Party had acquired during the 1964 campaign. Reagan explained that Republicans had lost because Democrats had been able to “portray us as advancing a kind of radical departure from the status quo.” To counter such Democratic tactics, Reagan declared:

Our job beginning now is not so much to sell conservatism as to prove that our conservatism is in truth what a lot of people thought they were voting

for when they fell for the cornpone come-on. In short--time now for the soft sell to prove our radicalism was an optical illusion.<sup>26</sup>

With this article Reagan signaled his realization that the anti-governmental populist themes that he and other Republicans had sounded during the Goldwater campaign needed to be refined and even toned down. To foster a broad electoral and legislative coalition, Republicans had to offer their conservative policy prescriptions with a rhetoric that defused charges of radicalism. Though Reagan would continue to draw upon populist appeals after 1964, he gravitated toward a strategy of rhetorical specialization, in which he generally reserved his more strident populist salvos for the purpose of mobilizing party loyalists, while tending to emphasize more consensual, “soft-sell” themes when addressing a broader audience. Furthermore, Reagan came to reserve his populist salvos for a limited set of economic issues, while using “softer,” consensual appeals when discussing a wide range of other topics.

As Reagan prepared to run for the governor of California, his advisors worked hard to distance him from the radical fringe of the Republican Party. When Goldwater offered to help his campaign, Reagan wrote a note thanking the former presidential candidate for his support but carefully sidestepped the offer. Once in the governorship, Reagan by no means dropped populism entirely. As Cannon aptly notes, Reagan still referred to the government as “them,” and viewed himself as the protector of Californians against “welfare cheats, foul-mouthed student demonstrators, and ivory-tower leaders of the state’s entrenched higher-education establishment.”<sup>27</sup> Yet populism was but one element of Reagan’s rhetorical approach. The signature theme of his governorship was the vision of “the creative society” in which government in partnership with private initiatives would play a positive role in solving the dilemmas of modern society. According to Reagan, while there needed to be

safeguards on government largesse, government would “lead but not rule, listen but not lecture.”<sup>28</sup>

In short, Reagan always retained a populist “sensitivity,” even as he shifted political allegiances and even as he responded to the strategic problems posed by populist rhetoric. To Reagan, politics consisted of a conflict between self-serving elites and ordinary Americans, and the job of the president was to fight the elites and restore the position and well-being of the general public. Given this view of politics, Reagan maintained an attachment to the populist Truman long after he came to reject many of the Democrat’s policies. Reagan recalled in his biography that “I campaigned for Harry Truman, and to this day, I think Truman was an outstanding president . . . He had a common sense that helped him get to the roots of problems; he stood up to the bureaucrats, and when he had a tough decision to make, he made it.”<sup>29</sup> Like Truman, Reagan viewed himself as a common sense leader capable of standing up to bureaucrats. But where Truman and other New Deal Democrats focused on corporate greed as the main target of their populist appeals, Reagan came to view big government, the Democratic Congress, and intellectual elites as the enemy of the people. These targets were linked together by the broader argument that wasteful, intrusive government is sustained by the combination of pork-minded Democratic members of Congress, demanding liberal interest groups and their associated clienteles, and out-of-touch elitist intellectuals. The victims of this combination were the American people as a whole, who were generally depicted in their role as taxpayers, or in terms of their role as small businessmen and workers, or as “the American family.” Where Truman, building on the successes of FDR, had sought to build a coalition of workers, farmers, and small business owners united by their underdog economic status, Reagan sought to win these groups’ allegiances by persuading them to think of themselves in terms of their status as taxpayers,

consumers, and as part of “the American family.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Reagan also departed from Truman in forging a rhetorical strategy that simultaneously used populist appeals to mobilize his base, while deploying more consensual themes to build a broader electoral and legislative coalition.

### Reagan’s Presidency: A New Populist Moment?

With Reagan’s convincing victory in the 1980 presidential election, the moment appeared ripe for the triumph of his brand of conservative populism on the national stage. In preparing his Inaugural Address, Reagan drew upon the blueprint of “the Speech” for inspiration, instructing his speechwriter, Ken Khachigian, to refer to it when writing the first draft.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the striking feature of Reagan’s First Inaugural Address is the extent to which he toned down the more antagonistic themes from his earlier rhetoric and instead quickly moved toward consensual, unifying rhetoric. Reagan did not indict the Democratic party for its alleged socialistic or totalitarian tendencies. He did not recommend reforming Social Security or cutting other specific governmental programs, and he never identified a specific enemy of “we the people.” In a *New York Times* op-ed, William Safire described the inaugural address as really two speeches. The first speech, Safire noted, was “an FDR-style warning of economic peril, coupled with an attack on big Government as the source of our problem.” In the second speech, Reagan shifted gears to emphasize more consensual themes, evoking “memories of patriotic fervor, national will, and individual sacrifice.”<sup>32</sup> While retaining the same commitment to scaling back the size of government as in 1964, Reagan had attempted to reach out to moderates by adding in a consensual, “soft-sell” approach to his earlier populist formula.

A content analysis of Reagan’s rhetoric as president reveals that this hybrid strategy persisted well beyond his inaugural address.<sup>33</sup> Reagan continued to draw upon populist imagery, but he limited his populism in two important ways. First, he generally reserved his populist appeals for a subset of issues. When discussing budgetary and tax

policies, Reagan often framed his appeals in antagonistic terms, emphasizing the need to protect taxpayers by reducing the size of government. However, when discussing a range of other issues that potentially could be framed in populist terms—such as social and cultural issues or defense policy—Reagan instead opted for an inclusive, consensual rhetoric that belied charges of radicalism. Second, Reagan skillfully tailored his rhetorical approach to his audience. When it came to formal addresses to a nationwide audience, Reagan accentuated his role as a unifying head of state and generally shunned populist appeals. By contrast, when campaigning for Republican candidates or when speaking to narrower, specialized audiences, Reagan made extensive use of populism. This bifurcated strategy allowed Reagan to appeal to blue collar workers and disaffected Democrats, while defusing the charges of intolerance or extremism that had dogged Goldwater.

### *Reagan's Populism: Cultural or Economic?*

A critical distinction for understanding Reagan's rhetoric is that between cultural and economic populism. Michael Kazin, a historian who studies the evolution of populism in American political history, argues that the conservative capture of populism in the 1970s and 1980s hinged on a cultural conception of populism rather than an economic one. According to Kazin, Republicans replaced the economic-based populism of such Democrats as FDR and Truman with a cultural populism in which the national government and liberal interest groups were attacked for undermining traditional values, for fostering disorder, and promoting the interests of minorities.<sup>34</sup> Kazin's depiction of conservative populism is reasonably apt for Richard Nixon, particularly if one focuses on Nixon's use of his first Vice President, Spiro Agnew, as a surrogate. Agnew traveled the

country denouncing “permissivists,” “avowed anarchists and communists,” “elitists,” the “garbage of society,” “thieves, traitors, and perverts,” and “radical liberals.”<sup>35</sup> Agnew’s explicit strategy was to achieve what he called a “positive polarization” of the electorate. In a 1971 speech describing his role in the 1970 elections, Agnew declared that “dividing the American people has been my main contribution to the national political scene since assuming the office of vice president . . . I not only plead guilty to this charge, but I am somewhat flattered by it.”<sup>36</sup> Nixon privately shared Agnew’s hatred for the so-called “Eastern Establishment,” but his public remarks tended to be much more restrained than the rhetoric of both his Vice President and his own private conversations.<sup>37</sup>

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

Reagan, who lacked Nixon’s private anger, went further in limiting his populism to economic targets rather than cultural ones. Table 1, which lists the subjects of Reagan’s populist appeals in his major addresses, shows that Reagan relied heavily on populist appeals when discussing economic matters, but rarely used these appeals when talking about cultural matters.<sup>38</sup> In 1982, he lamented politicians who felt pressure to subsidize the programs of “this or that special interest group” with more “government taxing, spending, and borrowing.”<sup>39</sup> In a May 1985 nationally televised speech on tax reform, Reagan charged that the present tax system was “un-American” and offered a plan that would “free us from the grip of special interests and create a binding commitment to the only special interest that counts--you the people who pay America’s bills.”<sup>40</sup> While it is true that Reagan decried how governmental policies had “betrayed families and family values,” he often defined family values in economic terms, not in cultural terms. For instance, in discussing the benefits of his policies for family life, he made the following observation:

Consider the social damage we were doing to the most basic unit of society, that engine of social progress--the family. For years inflation and taxes robbed the family of more and more of its livelihood--an economic factor, of course, but as I say, a moral factor, too . . . But by bringing down tax rates, inflation, and interest rates, by ending bracket creep, we've made family life safer and more secure.<sup>41</sup>

This is not to say that Reagan's populism was bereft of cultural references. For example, Reagan extolled the values of "diligent toil, moral piety, and self-governing communities" as they sought to mobilize the "moral majority" against a corrupt "liberal establishment."<sup>42</sup> During his eight years as president, Reagan also criticized "sophisticated circles" who opposed school prayer, but he did this only in minor addresses, not in any of his major addresses. On the whole, Reagan sought to project an image of the unifier, bringing the country together after a period of division. Discussing civil rights in his 1982 State of the Union message, Reagan remarked, "Our nation's long journey towards civil rights for all our citizens—once a source of discord, now a source of pride—must continue with no backsliding or slowing down."<sup>43</sup> Given this strategy, the antagonistic appeals of populism were generally reserved for economic issues in which big government played the role of an abstract enemy of the people. This contrasted with the more caustic approach of Agnew, in which specific groups of citizens--such as protesters and "permissivists"--were identified as the enemy.

By emphasizing the economic costs of big government rather than its cultural affinities, Reagan linked his populism to that of FDR and Truman. These earlier Democratic presidents had primarily defined the people in economic terms, using populist rhetoric to depict politics as a struggle between working people and greedy corporate leaders. For example, when fighting for new regulatory and redistributive policies in 1936, Roosevelt declared that "our resplendent economic autocracy does not want to return to that individualism of which they prate . . . Give them their way and they will take the course of



every autocracy of the past —power for themselves, enslavement for the public.”<sup>44</sup> Truman similarly conceived of the people in economic terms. In contrast to the economic autocrats and special interests, Truman identified “the people” as being “mostly made up of those who primarily work with their hands.”<sup>45</sup> Reagan also often referred to “working men and women” and “working families” in his speeches. For example, at several rallies in 1982, Reagan asked, “Will we create more jobs by going back to the policies that taxed working families like millionaires? Or is there a better way?”<sup>46</sup> However, when Reagan referred to workers he was not pitting them in an economic struggle with corporations. His conservative agenda led him to drop the class rhetoric of Roosevelt and Truman, even as he appealed to citizens’ economic interests. The key was to focus on the shared interests of a wide range of Americans--workers and businessmen, wealthy and middle class--victimized by the “bloated” federal government. For example, when Democrats attempted to frame his economic recovery program as benefiting the rich and hurting the poor, Reagan responded:

I don't believe it's the job of government to play to the politics of envy or division, to hand to Federal bureaucrats the right to redistribute our people's income in the hope of ushering in some great new utopia. Our economic program will try to help everyone. It'll encourage wealthier Americans to stop seeking tax shelters and invest in productive industries and businesses that will provide new jobs and greater wealth for all of us. It'll give the middle class--the middle-class, working American a fatter paycheck, a lowered inflation rate, a chance to invest and save, a chance to get a little ahead of the game again.<sup>47</sup>

In the same speech, Reagan pledged that his economic plan would also help entrepreneurs, small businessmen, and lower-income individuals. Thus, even as Reagan took a firm stand against class warfare, he appealed to citizens in terms of their ostensible economic interests.<sup>48</sup> By framing his populism in economic terms, Reagan focused attention on the federal government, an overspending Democratic Congress, and allied liberal special interest groups as the source of America’s troubles, while avoiding

direct attacks on specific, identifiable classes or groups of Americans.<sup>49</sup>

*Reagan's Populism: The Strategy of Specialization*

Just as Reagan limited his populist appeals to a subset of issues, he also employed a strategy of rhetorical specialization that helps to explain his split-image as both populist agitator and soft-sell spokesman. Reagan made only limited use of populist appeals in “official” forums, such as his Inaugural addresses and State of the Union messages. These occasions were primarily used to display the president as a unifying figure--the “soft-sell spokesman” of Robert Dallek. Reagan reserved most of his populist appeals for other, less formal occasions.

This pattern is apparent from a content analysis of Reagan's presidential papers.<sup>50</sup> Table 2 summarizes Reagan's use of populist appeals for each year for four categories of speeches: 1) Formal Addresses, which consist of inaugural addresses and state of the union messages, 2) Other Major Addresses, which consist of primetime addresses to a national televised audience, 3) Minor Addresses, which consist of remarks about governmental affairs such as a veto messages, addresses to economic interest groups and cultural groups, and Saturday morning radio addresses, and 4) campaign speeches, which consist of nomination acceptance addresses, speeches to campaign rallies, and speeches on behalf of members of Congress and other elected officials. From this table, it is evident that Reagan generally made only limited use of conflictual appeals during formal occasions. Out of a total of nine inaugural and state of the union messages, Reagan chose to use only seven populist appeals.<sup>51</sup> In most of these cases, the appeals consisted of limited attacks on the “bloated federal establishment.”<sup>52</sup> By contrast, Reagan made heavy use of consensual appeals during his formal, nationwide addresses.

When talking about social security reform, he applauded the American people for their capacity to “pull together for the common good.”<sup>53</sup> Reducing the size of the government even comes across as a largely consensual task: “Together we have cut the growth of new Federal regulations nearly in half.”<sup>54</sup> Reagan often used his formal speeches to portray the American people as a unified whole, linking together many different kinds of people who are often thought to have opposing interests. For example, in his 1985 annual address, Reagan argued that the farmer, the inner city resident, and the entrepreneur share common interests:

We're here to speak for millions in our inner cities who long for real jobs, safe neighborhoods, and schools that truly teach. We're here to speak for the American farmer, the entrepreneur, and every worker in industries fighting to modernize and compete. And, yes, we're here to stand, and proudly so, for all who struggle to break free from totalitarianism, for all who know in their hearts that freedom is the one true path to peace and human happiness.<sup>55</sup>

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

Though Reagan made more use of populism in nationwide speeches that did not have the formal trappings of the State of the Union or Inaugural address, he nonetheless tended to emphasize consensual themes rather than antagonistic ones. This is especially apparent when one compares these addresses to “the Speech” he gave for Goldwater. In the Goldwater speech, Reagan devoted a whole paragraph to describe how a young mother on welfare attempts to abuse the system and then derides liberals for supporting such programs. In contrast, as president, Reagan took a more indirect approach in his major primetime televised addresses. In his address to the nation on the economy, Reagan criticized the welfare system in the following terms:

In the past two decades, we've created hundreds of new programs to provide personal assistance. Many of these programs may have come from

a good heart, but not all have come from a clear head--and the costs have been staggering.<sup>56</sup>

A further indication of the tempered nature of Reagan's populist appeals in his major addresses is that he often used them to reinforce his soft-sell approach. For example, in a 1982 address to the nation, Reagan expressed his frustration at special interest groups which had painted him as an extremist. Reagan noted that these groups had charged that his "budget would deprive the needy, the handicapped, and the elderly of the necessities of life." According to Reagan, these claims had no basis. Yet Reagan avoided charges of bad faith on the part of his opponents, noting that "many of these people were sincere, well intentioned, but also misinformed."<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, Reagan's limited use of populism in his major addresses does not mean that his supposed populism was entirely an illusion. Reagan burnished his image as populist repudiator of the old order primarily in his minor speeches and in his campaign rhetoric (see Table 2). Reagan used populist appeals frequently at meetings of economic interest groups (173 times), party functions (79 times), and campaign fundraisers and rallies (96 times). This record pushes Reagan near the ranks of Truman in his reliance on populist appeals (see Table 3 below). It is in these minor addresses that Reagan returns repeatedly to the themes of "the Speech." In 1964, Reagan had offered Americans a choice between going down to totalitarianism or up to individual freedom. As president, Reagan presented the same choice in a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference:

The difference between the path toward greater freedom or bigger government is the difference between success and failure; between opportunity and coercion; between faith in a glorious future and fear of mediocrity and despair; between respecting people as adults, each with a spark of greatness, and treating them as helpless children to be forever dependent; between a drab, materialistic world where Big Brother rules by promises to special interest groups, and a world of adventure where

everyday people set their sights on impossible dreams, distant stars, and the Kingdom of God. We have the true message of hope for America.<sup>58</sup>

In a speech at the Annual Convention of the American G.I. Forum that was full of attacks on the Democratic Party, he warned, “Don't let America sink back into the boredom and mediocrity of collectivism, into the politics of envy, protest, and special interests.”<sup>59</sup>

Reagan's differential use of populist language in his nationwide and his minor speeches reveals a strategy of specialization, which has become increasingly common among presidents in the twentieth century. Although not dealing directly with populist rhetoric, other social scientists have observed a pattern in which politicians and presidents tailor their message to the partisan makeup of their audience. For instance, Aronson finds that when politicians are delivering a message to the party faithful, they are more likely to draw upon more extreme rhetoric than when addressing an audience of mixed loyalties such as in a nationwide address.<sup>60</sup>

In the nineteenth century, presidents did not have access to so many different venues for direct communication with the electorate. They were essentially limited to inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, veto messages, and other formal communications of the White House.<sup>61</sup> In the late twentieth century, the president has a host of media from which to choose: nationally televised addresses, press conferences, radio addresses, speeches to specific groups, interviews with favored reporters, and brief statements to the press. Given the limited number of venues in which to express presidential views directly to the public, nineteenth century executives had to make the most out their formal state communications. They had to play both the unifying role of the “chief of state” and the more divisive role of “prime minister” in their State of the Union messages.

In contrast, in the twentieth century, presidents can afford to specialize. They are able to employ the inaugural and state of the union addresses to highlight their chief of state role, while using other venues to play a more political, prime ministerial role.<sup>62</sup> Reagan was clearly not the first president to rely on this strategy of specialization, but he was a

particularly effective practitioner. Where Truman's populist salvos in the 1948 campaign dominated his image for the remainder of his term, Reagan was able to foster a broader coalition by attacking the abstract enemy of big government and refraining from an all out attack on any specific governmental program or group of individuals. Consequently, he was still able to play the unifying role of consensual leader and head of state in his formal addresses. This specialization may explain why scholars have reached such divergent conclusions about Reagan: he was both a consensual leader (in his official rhetoric) and a populist "agitator" (in his campaign speeches and minor addresses).

### Reagan's Populist Legacy

Reagan was neither the first nor the last president to practice conservative populism. Richard Nixon, in particular, departed from past Republican presidents by making significant use of populist appeals.<sup>63</sup> From Table 3, it is evident that Nixon was the first president after Truman to engage in a substantial number of populist appeals. Nixon made a total of 147 populist appeals as president--far short of Truman's 1,238 appeals--but more than his immediate predecessors. The evolution of conservative populism, however, was slow and uneven. Only seventeen of Nixon's 147 populist appeals took place in major addresses. In addition, as noted above, Nixon contracted out his fiercest populist attacks to his Vice President. Agnew's attacks on cultural and social issues have not become a part of the Reagan-era populist formula, which instead has emphasized an economic critique of big government.<sup>64</sup>

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Reagan's Democratic predecessor Jimmy Carter also attempted to cloak his presidency in populist symbolism. Carter famously chose to walk instead of ride down Pennsylvania Avenue after his inauguration and requested that "Hail to the Chief" not be played every time he entered a public place. The Georgia Democrat also used a fair number of populist appeals in his rhetoric, attacking both traditional Democratic targets, such as

lobbyists for the wealthy, and newer, conservative targets, such as wasteful congressional spending. Yet the populist mantle did not fit easily on Carter, who approached his presidency through the lens provided by his engineering background. In the end, the mantra of his presidency, “no easy answers,” conflicted with populist suspicions about experts.<sup>65</sup> Even Carter’s populist assaults against wasteful government projects were framed in terms of the technical language of cost-benefit analysis.<sup>66</sup>

Reagan was considerably more successful than Carter in integrating populism into his leadership approach. Though Reagan did at times rely upon statistics in unleashing his attacks on government, these statistics were presented in stark terms that were easy to understand.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, from his 1948 anecdote about the 91-year old Smith L. Carpenter who was forced back to work by “Republican inflation” through his final speeches as president, Reagan skillfully used stories about individual Americans to personalize his argument for his audience. By repeatedly referring back to his status as a citizen politician outside the Washington establishment, Reagan avoided the tension between expertise and populism that pervaded Carter’s leadership.

Yet Reagan’s successful integration of populism into his rhetorical leadership has not necessarily set a blueprint for his Republican successors. Compared to Reagan, George H.W. Bush was more restrained in his use of populist appeals in his Inaugural Address, State of the Union messages, or other major nationwide speeches (see Table 3). Bush did make more use of populism in his minor speeches and especially in his campaign rhetoric. Indeed, in his four years in office, Bush actually used slightly more populist appeals in his campaign remarks than did Reagan in his eight years in the White House. This extreme form of rhetorical specialization suggests an increasing disconnect between populism as a campaign strategy and populism as an element of a governing strategy. When Bush sought to gain support for enactment of his policies, he generally embraced consensual rhetorical appeals.<sup>68</sup> However, when he sought reelection and campaigned for Republican candidates, he adopted a far more conflictual, populist approach.

The rise to the presidency of Bush's son, George W. Bush, also suggests both the limitations and the staying power of Reagan's populist legacy. When lobbying for his tax cut in 2001, Bush borrowed heavily from the Reagan conservative populist playbook, arguing that the "people" know how to spend their money better than "Washington bureaucrats."<sup>69</sup> Yet Bush's signature slogan of "compassionate conservatism" harkens back to the other side of Reagan's rhetorical approach: that of the consensual unifier, the "soft-sell" spokesman. The question is which of these images will in the end dominate for Bush and future Republican presidents. In either case, Reagan will have left a significant mark on the rhetorical approach of his Republican successors.



**TABLE 1: TARGETS OF REAGAN’S POPULIST APPEALS IN MAJOR ADDRESSES\***  
(BASED ON HAND-CODING)

<u>Type of Address</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject of Populist Appeals</u>
Inaugural Address	January 20, 1981	Big Government (elites and accountability)
Address to the Nation	February 18, 1981	Big Government (cost)
Address to the Nation	April 28, 1981	Big Government (cost)
Address to the Nation	July 27, 1981	Tax Reform
State of the Union Address	January 26, 1982	Big Government (cost and accountability), Tax reform
Address to the Nation	April 29, 1982	General Budget and Balanced Budget Amendment
Address to the Nation	August 16, 1982	Tax and Budget Legislation
Address to the Nation	October 13, 1982	Government spending
Address to the Nation	November 22, 1982	Strategic Arms Defense
Address to the Nation	January 25, 1984	Tax Reform
Inaugural Address	January 21, 1985	Big Government (cost and accountability)
Address to the Nation	February 6, 1985	Big Government (cost and accountability), Education Policy
Address to the Nation	April 24, 1985	Big Government (cost, accountability, and elites), Amtrak, and farm subsidies
Address to the Nation	May 28, 1985	Tax Reform
State of the Union Address	February 4, 1986	Big Government (cost and accountability), Education Policy
Address to the Nation	February 26, 1986	Reform of Defense Appropriations Process
State of the Union Address	January 27, 1987	Big Government (costs), Welfare System (cost and regulations)
State of the Union Address	January 25, 1988	Big Government (costs)

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\*Major addresses include inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, and other prime time, nationally televised speeches.

**TABLE 2: POPULIST APPEALS ACROSS DIFFERENT TYPES OF MESSAGE  
DURING REAGAN'S ADMINISTRATION, 1981-1989  
(BASED ON CD-ROM CODING)**

Year	Inaugural Addresses & State of the Union Messages	Other Major Address to the Nation	Minor Addresses	Campaign Addresses	Total
1981	2	3	39	0	44
1982	0	7	69	12	88
1983	1	0	82	0	83
1984	0	1	50	37	88
1985	2	6	117	3	128
1986	1	2	82	10	95
1987	1	2	101	0	104
1988	0	2	55	34	91
1989	0	0	10	0	10
Total	7	23	605	96	731

**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF POPULIST APPEALS ACROSS FOUR TYPES OF MESSAGES,  
1932-1993  
(BASED ON CD-ROM CODING)**

**The average number of populist appeals per address appears in parentheses in the columns for inaugural addresses and state of the union messages, and for other major addresses.**

President	Inaugural Addresses and State of the Union Messages (formal)	Other Major Addresses	Minor Addresses	Campaign Addresses	Total
FDR	10 (.63)	10 (.34)	57	26	103
Truman	12 (1.50)	42 (1.82)	317	867	1238
Eisenhower	3 (.30)	5 (.16)	34	22	64
JFK	0 (0)	1 (.09)	16	0	17
LBJ	0 (0)	2 (.13)	34	11	47
Nixon	6 (.75)	11 (.40)	110	20	147
Ford	1 (.33)	2 (.22)	109	44	156
Carter	3 (.33)	8 (.62)	196	18	225
Reagan	7 (.77)	23 (.61)	605	96	731
Bush	3 (.60)	6 (.50)	223	137	369
Clinton*	0 (0)	5 (1.67)	125	0	130

\*1993 only.

## **Appendix: Methods used in Content Analysis of Presidential Messages and Papers**

Searching the American Freedom Library CD-Rom for the data in this paper involved a two-step process. First, I searched for words such as “special interest,” “interests of the few” and “elite.” Within the AFL database, there is also a search function that permits searches of combinations of words within ten words of one another. Searches of this nature were done for “rich-poor,” “few-many,” and “private-public,” among others. See List A1 for the full listing of search terms.

After a word or phrase was found in the database, we read the surrounding text to validate its usage and also to examine the context itself, e.g. what institutions, class, or programs were being attacked. At times, the tabbed word or phrase was used but not in an antagonistic manner. For example, throughout his eight years as president, Reagan was fond of saying that the only special interest group he would serve as president was “we the people.”<sup>70</sup> These instances were not coded as antagonistic appeals since they did not directly imply a conflict between the people and a special interest or other corrupt minority. By contrast, an example of an antagonistic appeal using this phrasing occurred when Reagan addressed the Alabama State Legislature. He pointed out that “the underlying purpose of our whole federalism initiative is to wrest control of government from the hands of special interests and return it to the American people it was always intended to represent and serve.”<sup>71</sup>

As a validity check, I compared the results from the computer searches of the inaugural and state of the union messages with those obtained from coding each of these speeches by hand. The two approaches generate reasonably similar results: the number of populist appeals for each president counted in the manual coding correlates at .78 with the number of appeals counted in the computer searches. In discussing the results in this paper, I

emphasize the CD-Rom coding approach, but note any differences that emerge in the hand coding. The only exception is Table 1 which is based on the hand-coding of populist appeals in the inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, and other major addresses of Reagan.

The next step was to was to categorize the forum in which the president used the appeal. Four categories were used:

1. Inaugural and State of the Union messages
2. Other Major Addresses
3. Campaign Speeches
4. Minor Speeches and messages

List A2 describes the criteria used to assign speeches or messages to each category.

### **LIST A1: SEARCH WORDS AND PHRASES**

1. elite
2. faction
3. “few many” @ 10
4. “interests of the few”
5. “local national” @ 10
6. “majority minority” @ 10
7. “money power” or “monied power” or “moneyed power”
8. monopol\*
9. “partial general” @ 10
10. “private public” @ 10
12. “rich poor”@10
13. “special interest” or “special interests”
14. “sectional national”
15. “upper lower”
16. sophisticate\*
17. establishment
18. expert\*
19. pressure group\*
20. lobby\*
21. “particular general” @ 10
22. big government
23. bureauc\*
24. greedy
25. big business

Notes: The “@ 10” sign denotes that the search terms were allowed to appear up to ten words from one another within a given speech. The “\*” sign means that the search encompassed all words that had the given root (e.g. “monopol\*” included monopoly, monopolist, monopolies, etc).

## **LIST A2: TYPES OF ADDRESSES**

Derived from the coding schemes contained in Barbara Hinckley's *The Symbolic Presidency* and Lyn Ragsdale's *Vital Statistics on the American Presidency*

### **1. Inaugural Addresses and State of the Union Messages**

#### **2. Other Major Addresses**

Televised (nationwide) Addresses

Addresses to the Nation on radio before 1945

Addresses to a Joint Session of Congress

Televised Veto Message

Regular Veto Message: Coded as Major until the end of Andrew Johnson's administration

Major Proclamations such as the Neutrality Proclamation and the Emancipation Proclamation

Major Farewell Addresses (namely Washington's and Eisenhower's)

Televised (nationwide) News Conference

Televised Interviews with Reporters

Televised speeches followed by question and answer by reporters

Televised speeches followed by a question and answer period by citizens, e.g. town hall meeting

#### **3. Campaign Speeches**

-Nomination Acceptance Address

-Campaign Address explicitly (presidential or congressional elections)

#### **4. Minor Speeches and messages**

National Government: all remarks on signing bills and making appointments or nominations; all remarks to Congress, members of Congress, government agencies, or other national government personnel; any remarks on specific government policies as opposed to general discussion of foreign affairs (coded below).

International Affairs: All remarks abroad, \*except those addressed to US citizens such as journalists or military personnel\*; all remarks in the United States addressed to representatives of foreign nations; all remarks to international organizations or those that cross national lines, except for religious organizations.

International Affairs: Remarks made to US citizens about Foreign Affairs

Party Groups: All remarks to groups of either of the two major political parties (except note campaign remarks).

Economic Interest Groups: All remarks to groups that seek benefits from the federal government for their members, whether the group is broad or specific and whether members must formally join or not; for example farm, labor, and business interest groups; groups concerned with blacks, women, veterans, the disabled; all remarks to conferences of governors or mayors or other conferences of state or local officials.

Cultural and Religious Affairs: All remarks to religious gathering or representatives of religious organizations; remarks to groups concerned with cultural or educational issues, with the exception of economic interest groups coded above: thus, science, arts, journalism, entertainment, sports, citizenship; remarks to all youth organizations, university commencements, fraternal organizations; remarks on cultural and religious holidays.

Regional Travel: Remarks outside Washington DC and not coded above: for example, speeches at airports on trips around the country; remarks at local ceremonies. Nixon's briefings on domestic policy to various regional media are included here, as well as Ford's "Conferences on Domestic and Economic Affairs" held in California, Florida, New Hampshire, and Ohio. Remarks at universities that are not commencements.

Ceremonial and Patriotic Affairs: Ceremonial remarks to military academies and military personnel (e.g. Medal of Honor recipients); ceremonies honoring other national figures past and present; other ceremonies and dedications within Washington, DC; remarks on patriotic holidays; remarks to patriotic groups (except veterans). Ceremonies for government figures or interest group representative (a birthday party for a member of Congress, the dedication of a square in memory of Samuel Gompers) would be coded here rather than in the "national government" or "economic interest groups" categories.

Radio Addresses after 1945

Other: The residual category for remarks not coded above; primarily, talks on issues such as traffic safety, that are not connected with a specific government policy or directed to an economic interest group.



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1. Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, 1999), 32. Bert Rockman, "The Style and Organization of the Reagan Presidency," in *The Reagan Legacy: Promise and Performance*, ed. Charles O. Jones (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1988), 8.
  8. For Thomas Cronin quote, see Jack Nelson, "The Reagan Legacy," in *Beyond Reagan: The Politics of Upheaval*, ed. Paul Duke (New York: Warner Books, 1986), 111.
  2. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 260-266.
  3. Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (New York: Random House, 1990), 143.
  4. Populism, in this study, refers to a form of rhetorical appeal that pits the people against a corrupt special interest or minority [see Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 1 and Thomas Goebel, "The Political Economy of American Populism from Jackson to the New Deal," *Studies in American Political Development* 11 (spring 1997): 109-148]. This definition of populism as a political argument has the benefit of sidestepping debates over the substance of a populist appeal and whether or not a policy in fact harms the people. Political leaders are able to draw upon populist appeals to promote progressive, conservative, partisan, or personal agendas.
  5. Ronald Reagan with Richard G. Hubler, "*Where's the Rest of Me?*" (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1965), 139.
  6. Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), 79.
  7. Transcript taken from Talking History, October 26, 2000, Segment 5, "Truman vs. Dewey: Excerpts from a 1948 Union Radio," <http://www.albany.edu/talkinghistory/arch2000july-december.html>.
  8. "Truman Talks About Why He Ran in '48," [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/student\\_activities/sta8-1.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/student_activities/sta8-1.htm)
  9. Harry Truman, "Remarks at a Dinner Given by the Chairmen and Directors of Federal Reserve Banks," January 16, 1950, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 114.
  10. Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 25.

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11. Kurt Ritter and David Henry. *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 44-45.
  12. Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation," January 11, 1989, *Presidential Papers of the Presidents*, 1721.
  13. See Terri Bimes, *The Metamorphosis of Presidential Populism* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1999).
  14. Andrew Jackson, "Bank Veto Message," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), 1153.
  15. Interestingly, Reagan's use of an individual citizen's story—in this case, the ninety-one year old Smith L. Carpenter—to personalize his argument also was a staple of his rhetoric as president. But in his State of the Union messages, Reagan tended to use such stories to highlight consensual themes—such as the heroism of individual citizens—rather than as part of his populist appeals.
  16. The sources of this ideological shift have been explored by Cannon, *Reagan*, 91-97; William E. Leuchtenburg, "In the Shadow of FDR," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 222-223; and Gary Wills, "Reagan's America: Innocence at Home," (Garden city, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1987), 257-258.
  17. Ronald Reagan, *Speaking My Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 21.
  18. Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of A Lifetime*, 67.
  19. As reported by Lou Cannon, *Reagan*, 94.
  20. Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 129.
  21. Reagan, *An American Life*, 129.
  22. Reagan and Hubler, *Where's the Rest of Me?*, 264.
  23. Reagan, *An American Life*, 137. Cannon, *Reagan*, 96. As suggested by Gary Wills, General Electric may have also cancelled the show because they were wary of an antitrust suit lodged by the Kennedy Justice Department that named the Screen Actor's Guild from the time when Reagan was president as a co-conspirator.
  24. As cited in E.J. Dionne Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 204.
  25. Stephen Hess and David S. Broder, *The Republican Establishment: The Present and Future of the G.O.P.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 253.

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26. Ronald Reagan, *National Review*, Dec. 1, 1964, 1055.
27. Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 30.
28. Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," January 5, 1967 in *Actor, Ideologue, Politician: The Public Speeches of Ronald Reagan*, eds. Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 40-46.
29. Reagan, *An American Life*, 133.
30. Truman defined the Democratic Party as "the great middle-of-the-road party—the party of the farmers and the workers and the small businessmen and the party of the young people." Speech at the State Fairgrounds, Raleigh, North Carolina, Oct. 19, 1948, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 824.
31. Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 73-77.
32. William Safire, "The Land is Bright," *The New York Times*, January 22, 1981.
33. To operationalize populism in the content analysis, I chose key words that tapped into this conflictual notion of the people against a special interest and searched for these words in the presidential papers. The American Freedom Library has recently put the messages and papers of presidents from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries on CD-Rom. With the help of a research assistant, I then used Boolean searches for twenty-one populist words and phrases in the presidential papers. I searched for such words as "special interest," "interests of the few" and "elite." Within the AFL database, there is also a search function that permits searches of combinations of words within ten words of one another. Searches of this nature were done for "rich-poor," "few-many," and "private-public," among others. After a word or phrase was found in the database, the research assistant read the surrounding text to validate its usage (i.e. to make sure the phrase was used in an antagonistic manner) and also to examine the context itself, e.g. what institutions, class, or programs were being attacked. A full description of the methodology used in the content analysis is available in the appendix to this paper.
34. Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, ch. 10.
35. As cited in James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*, rev. ed., (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 387.
36. "Divisive but Positive, Agnew Says of Himself," *Washington Post*, October 6, 1971, A2.

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37. One example of Nixon's private hatred occurred in April 1971 in a White House meeting with Henry Ford II and Lee Iacocca. During a discussion about environmental protection, Nixon called consumer and environmental advocates "enemies of the system." "They're interested in destroying the system," he charged, while "I am for the system." This kind of rhetoric was rare in Nixon's formal addresses as president. [As cited in Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1991), 515-516].
38. Major addresses include inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, and other prime time, nationally televised speeches. See Lyn Ragsdale, *Vital statistics on the Presidency: Washington to Clinton*, rev ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1998). Prior to the onset of television, major addresses also include nationally broadcasted radio addresses.
39. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Economy," Oct. 13, 1982, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1310.
40. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Tax Reform," May 28, 1985, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 678-679. Although Reagan criticized the tax system throughout his administration, his reforms actually strengthened the national government's capacity to collect taxes. See W. Elliot Brownlee's essay in this volume, "The President as Accidental Reformer: Tax Policy during the Reagan Administration."
41. Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform," February 9, 1987, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 116.
42. Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 246.
43. Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," January 26, 1982, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 77.
44. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress," January 3, 1936, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, F. D. Roosevelt, 1936, Item 1.
45. Truman, "Rear Platform and Other Informal Remarks in Michigan and Ohio," September 6, 1948, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 466.
46. Reagan, "Remarks at a North Carolina Republican Party Rally in Raleigh," October 26, 1982, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1388.

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47. Reagan, "Remarks at the Republican Congressional "Salute to President Ronald Reagan Dinner," May 4, 1982, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 557.

48. Reagan's rhetoric also harkens back to Truman's in his repeated reference to his status as the sole representative of the "special interest group" of "we the people." Truman similarly depicted himself as "the people's lobbyist."

49. The special interests attacked by Reagan were rarely identified by name.

50. See footnote 32 above for a summary of the methodology used in the content analysis.

51. One potential concern about the content analysis methodology is that it is plausible that searching for specific terms leads one to miss populist appeals that use phrases that are omitted from the coding scheme. When Reagan's Inaugural and State of the Union speeches were coded by hand, a few additional populist appeals were found, but this did not change the general tenor of the results: Reagan made less use of populist appeals in his State of the Union and Inaugural speeches than in his minor addresses and campaign speeches. It is also worth noting that the appeals found through the hand-coding also tended to be focused on economic, rather than cultural issues.

52. Reagan, for instance, said in his second Inaugural address, "We must never again abuse the trust of working men and women, by sending their earnings on a futile chase after the spiraling demands of a bloated Federal Establishment," January 21, 1985, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 56.

53. Reagan, "Address Before A Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," January 25, 1983, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 103.

54. Reagan, "Address Before A Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," January 26, 1982, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 73.

55. Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," February 6, 1985, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 130.

56. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery," September 24, 1981, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 833.

57. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Fiscal Year 1983 Federal Budget," April 29, 1982, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 533.

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58. Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner," March 2, 1984, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 289.
59. Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American G.I. Forum in El Paso, Texas," August 13, 1983, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Reagan*, 1162.
60. Elliot Aronson, *The Social Animal* (San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman, 1972), 70-71.
61. Presidents in the nineteenth century did take advantage of partisan newspapers to persuade voters of their favored policies, but in many cases, their participation was concealed. See Mel Laracey, "The Presidential Newspaper: The Forgotten Way of Going Public" in *Speaking to the People*, ed. Richard J. Ellis (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 66-86.
62. Lawrence W. Miller and Lee Sigelman, "Is the Audience the Message? A Note on LBJ's Vietnam Statements," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42, 1 (spring 1978): 71-80.
63. Eisenhower, for example, according to Fred Greenstein [*The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), ch. 1], styled himself as a hidden-hand leader, who studiously avoided "engaging in personalities," and instead sought to use a consensual style that highlighted his role as chief of state rather than prime minister. Prior to Nixon, the sole Republican president who relied extensively on populism during his administration was Theodore Roosevelt, but Roosevelt used populism to promote his progressive reform agenda rather than on behalf of conservatism (Bimes, *The Metamorphosis of Presidential Populism*, 1999).
64. Nixon's political goal of appearing to be a moderate alternative to the Democrats likely limited his use of populism. To this effect, Nixon campaigned with the slogan, "Bring Us Together" in 1968 and urged the country in his first Inaugural Address to tone down its "angry" and "bombastic rhetoric" (Richard Nixon, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1969, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 2.). These consensual slogans, while fitting in with his governing agenda, also helped moderate his public image from the 1950s as a zealous anticommunist crusader.
65. Stephen Skowronek, "Bill Clinton in Political Time," (New York: French-American Foundation, 1996), 24.
66. Carter's famous attack on water projects in 1977 seemed an ideal opportunity for the new president to take on a populist stance against the corrupt influence of special interests. Although Carter did point out

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that special interests would benefit from specific water projects, his primary focus centered on standards of efficiency and effectiveness. In a letter to Congress in March 1977, Carter explained his rationale for eliminating nineteen projects. Only two were singled out for their benefits to special interests; the other seventeen were eliminated based on economic, legal, and environmental criteria. Carter affirmed that his review process had been “objective, complete, and fair.” His decision to delete these projects was motivated out of a “commitment to fiscal responsibility, environmental quality, and human safety.” (Carter, “Water Resource Projects,” March 16, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 454-455).

67. Before becoming president, Reagan drew many of his statistics from *Reader’s Digest*. His statistics as president had a similar quality. See Cannon, *Reagan*, 197.

68. The coding scheme in this paper focuses on identifying conflictual appeals. However, the additional methodology adopted in my book manuscript (Bimes, *The Metamorphosis of Presidential Populism*) includes hand-coding each Inaugural address and State of the Union message, allowing one to assess directly the extent to which each president used consensual appeals. Using that coding scheme, I conclude that Bush made extensive use of consensual appeals and much more limited use of populist rhetoric. The book manuscript also provides a detailed discussion of the content of consensual appeals.

69. See George W. Bush, “Address of the President to the Joint Session of Congress,” February 27, 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/release/2001/02/2001028.html>. Also see George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President in Billings Montana Welcome Event,” March 26, 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010327.html>.

<sup>70</sup>For instance, see Reagan’s Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981. See also Reagan’s “Address to the Nation on the Economy,” February 5, 1981 and his Remarks at the Annual Convention of the United States Jaycees in San Antonio, Texas, June 24, 1981. Distinguishing between “positive” uses of a term such as “special interests” and antagonistic (that is, populist) uses of such a term can be difficult at times. In general, I attempted to define antagonistic appeals narrowly, to include only instances in which the president’s usage directly suggested that the “people” were being exploited or otherwise victimized.

<sup>71</sup>Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Alabama State Legislature in Montgomery,” March 15, 1982.