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THE FACTS: PRESIDENT REAGAN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND STABILITY WHILE IN OFFICE NEVER IN QUESTION

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Only a few days into the New Year, we have already learned much: Donald Trump is still President, he is by all accounts still sensitive to what irks him, and, contrary to those who attempt to make a comparison, he is nothing like Ronald Reagan. From the way they govern to the way they communicate, there is nothing whatsoever similar about them.

Our sense is that President Trump really does not invite nor would especially accept or appreciate a comparison to any U.S. President to come before him, Reagan or otherwise. We've no doubt that, love him or leave him, in his view, he stands alone.

But during President Trump's remarks in defense of his mental health status as a result of supposed revelations in Michael Wolff's book, "*Fire and Fury*", he mentioned that his critics are "taking out the old Ronald Reagan playbook." Some are. But what's most troubling about the look back in time is a historical rewrite where the record simply needs to be set straight.

To wit, several commentators have their facts just plain wrong: they claim that in the late-1980's, while in office, Ronald Reagan had Alzheimer's. Some have reached back in time to grab headlines: "Is Reagan Senile?" asked a May, 1987 edition of the *New Republic*.

Truth is, those headlines were ageist, and not about the possibility that President Reagan had Alzheimer's (a condition not diagnosed or made public until 1994). Actually, ever since Ronald Reagan's first substantial run for President in 1976 at the age of 65, those opposed to Reagan labeled him as "old" and proclaimed his age a huge disadvantage compared to his opponents.

Of course, they'd say the same thing four years later when he won the White House and four years beyond when he won a second term -- both by landslides, in both the popular vote and the Electoral College. The vote margins were massive, among the biggest in American history, and no one ever claimed that he was an illegitimate president.

O'Reilly's flawed book

It could be argued that this form of Reagan-bashing had been given a boost by Bill O'Reilly, a "conservative" (but not really) darling in the media. His sloppy, amateur and almost-childish

written book, "*Killing Reagan*," was immediately denounced by every credible Reaganite, close Reagan associate or knowledgeable historian of note who has written about the 40th President.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/08/opinion/what-bill-oreilly-gets-wrong-about-ronald-reagan.html>

That book falsely claims that Reagan's Alzheimer's was noticeable during his presidency, was suppressed from the public and stemmed, ridiculously enough, from the moment President Reagan was shot in March, 1981. The book is flacked as history, but it's questionable why a work of such fiction might find its way to the History section of any reputable

bookstore. <https://www.csmonitor.com/Books/chapter-and-verse/2015/1030/Bill-O-Reilly-s-Killing-Reagan-faces-a-raft-of-criticism>

Let's put it clearly and simply: there is no truth to the notion of Ronald Reagan having Alzheimer's during his presidency. Any piece of information that claims this is either taken out of context or is an outright lie from those who simply ignore history and know nothing about medicine.

Ask Ed Meese, President Reagan's closest adviser, what he thought of President Reagan's health. There will be nothing about Alzheimer's. Ask others who worked closely with the President. There will be nothing. Ask for doctor's notes or physicals or anything that would've meticulously been kept. What is there? Nothing. That's how much truth there is to the canard. Reagan went to the Bethesda Naval Hospital each year for physical and psychological testing and each year of his presidency he passed with flying colors. Following his presidency, he went to the Mayo Clinic for extensive annual exams starting in 1989 and was given an annual test for dementia and mental deterioration. Each year he passed the extensive exam without showing any signs of dementia beyond normal aging until his test in 1994.

Those who want to use Reagan's sad illness, the onset of which did not occur until 1994, a full five years after leaving office, for their own reasons or for political gain cannot seem to help it. They want to use a man's disease to discredit a president who even those of a different political persuasion, such as former President Barack Obama, have looked up to.

'No evidence'

Is there any medical evidence, doctors' notes, counseling reports or any other information indicating that President Reagan suffered mentally in any way at any time in office? No. In fact, Dr. Robert Altman, longtime *New York Times* medical correspondent, looked for just such evidence and found none.

Altman, who examined the subject in the wake of Ron Reagan's 2011 book suggesting that this father may have shown signs of illness in his presidency, wrote, "In my extensive interviews with his White House doctors, key aides and others, I found no evidence that Mr. Reagan exhibited signs of dementia as president," he wrote. "No other family member—and not Edmund Morris, the biographer who spent seven years with Mr. Reagan in the White House—publicly hinted that he showed evidence of Alzheimer's as president." <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/22/health/views/22reagan.html>

There is not a single mention from a White House staff person, a credible book author, or physician that President Reagan experienced even a single day where he was mentally incapacitated or unable to serve.

Among the 66 million documents in the Reagan Library archives are schedules that track every minute of Reagan's presidency, along with his own handwritten daily diary of his activities. It's clear from the documents that Reagan fully carried out the responsibilities of his office and was actively occupied in that role throughout his two terms.

Rumor and innuendo that suggests a story to the contrary do a real disservice to our 40th President -- and history itself.

Editor's note: John Heibusch is the Executive Director of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute. Historian Craig Shirley is author of four books on Ronald Reagan including his most recent, "Last Act." The opinions expressed in this commentary are theirs.

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