

Final Radio Address to the Nation

January 14, 1989

My fellow Americans:

Over the years I've greatly enjoyed this opportunity to get together with you and report on the week's events here in Washington. But next week, after witnessing the inauguration of George Bush as President, Nancy and I will head back to the ranch. We go with full hearts, with best wishes for George and Barbara, and with gratitude to all of you. It's been a privilege to serve the people and the Nation we've always loved and love so much today.

It's difficult, of course, to put all the events of 8 busy, tumultuous years in perspective; in fact, that's best left to the impartial judgment of history. But as I look back over these Saturday talks, I can't help but think about how often at moments of accomplishment and triumph, as well as crisis and heartbreak, we came together in this way: a President giving his accounting to those, under our system of government, to whom he is accountable. We've shared a great deal together; for me it's been a special relationship. Believe me, Saturdays will never seem the same. I'll miss you.

But you know, somehow messages of farewell, leave-taking, and nostalgia don't quite capture my mood today. Don't get me wrong, we've had great years and done much together. The economy is booming. Long-festered social problems like drugs, crime, and a decline in our educational standards are being dealt with. And for the first time in the postwar era, the Soviet menace shows some signs of relenting. This last development is, of course, so heartening to those of us who have lived through all the brooding terrors of the postwar era. We're prayerful and hopeful—hopeful that the next generation of Americans will not have to contend as we did with the nightmares of nuclear terror and totalitarian expansionism.

You know, shortly after World War II and the struggle against Nazi Germany, Winston Churchill looked with grave concern and sadness at a world that evolved so quickly, as he put it, from "triumph and tragedy." But then as he began to detect the vigor and resolve of America against the Soviet menace and for freedom in Europe and everywhere in the world—a vigor and resolve shared equally by an American President and an American Congress of different political parties—he grew hopeful and grateful for this unselfish, bipartisan unity.

There's a story I want to tell you today about a meeting Churchill had with a group of American journalists in 1952 at a time when all the troubles of the cold war, including the hardship of morally and militarily rearming the West, were keenly felt. His friend and physician, Lord Moran, recorded Churchill's appraisal of American leadership. "What other nation in history," Churchill asked, "when it became supremely powerful, has had no thought of territorial aggrandizement, no ambition but to use its resources for the good of the world? I marvel at America's altruism, her sublime disinterestedness." "All at once I realized," Lord Moran wrote, "Winston was in tears, his eyes were red, his voice faltered. He was deeply moved."

Well, generous words, honest emotion from a great world leader; and now, more than a quarter century later, as the decade of the eighties comes to a close, there is hope that the generosity and resolve that Churchill saw in the American people is at last paying an historic dividend: the possibility of a new time in human history when all the problems that so haunted the postwar world give way to peace and expansion of freedom.

So, you can see why to me, the story of these last 8 years and this Presidency goes far beyond any personal concerns. It is a continuation really of a far larger story, a story of a people and a cause—a cause that from our earliest beginnings has defined us as a nation and given purpose to our national existence.

The hope of human freedom—the quest for it, the achievement of it—is the American saga. And I've often recalled one group of early settlers making a treacherous crossing of the Atlantic on a small ship when their leader, a minister, noted that perhaps their venture would fail and they would become a byword, a footnote to history. But perhaps, too, with God's help, they might also found a new world, a city upon a hill, a light unto the nations.

Those words and that destiny beckon to us still. Whether we seek it or not, whether we like it or not, we Americans are keepers of the miracles. We are asked to be guardians of a place to come to, a place to start again, a place to live in the dignity God meant for his children. May it ever be so. Thanks for listening, and God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Citation: Ronald Reagan: "Final Radio Address to the Nation ." January 14, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American*

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