Antithesis and Oxymoron: Ronald Reagan's Figurative Rhetorical Structure

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Abstract
Reagan and Public Discourse in America assesses the rhetorical legacy of the Reagan Presidency. The essays in this collection focus on a variety of domestic and foreign policy controversies and identify a broad range of persuasive strategies and devices to reveal how Ronald Reagan both appropriated and transformed American public discourse in the 1980s. Reagan's obvious skill at speech-making earned him the title "Great Communicator," but the contributors to this book seek his rhetorical significance in deeper waters. They analyze Reagan's impact not only on the policy issues of the 1980s but also on the process of public political discourse itself. The contributors uncover ways in which Ronald Reagan helped to change how we talk about public issues, and, just as important, what kinds of issues we talk about. They find Reagan a constricting and distorting influence; his rhetoric tended to remove some issues from public debate and to limit the discussion of others chiefly to rituals, gestures, and evasions. From nuclear strategy to social welfare programs, from budget policy to military intervention, Reagan's rhetoric impoverished and perverted political discourse in the public sphere. Taken together, the essays in this collection challenge the traditional emphasis in rhetorical criticism on individual speech texts in unique historical situations. The contributors find the "text" of their analyses not only in Reagan's public comments on a particular issue, but in the articulation of this issue-specific rhetoric with the historically evolving process of public discourse as a whole. Here, they argue, is where Reagan's greatest significance as a communicator is to be found.

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RAY-gan; February 6, 1911 – June 5, 2004) was an American politician who served as the 40th president of the United States from 1981 to 1989 and became a highly influential voice of modern conservatism. Prior to his presidency, he was a Hollywood actor and union leader before serving as the 33rd governor of California from 1967 to 1975.