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EDITED BY ANDREW L. JOHNS

A COMPANION TO  
RONALD REAGAN



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# A Companion to Ronald Reagan

*Edited by*

Andrew L. Johns

**WILEY** Blackwell

This edition first published 2015

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John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex,  
PO19 8SQ, UK

*Editorial Offices*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A companion to Ronald Reagan / edited by Andrew L. Johns.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-65504-7 (cloth)

1. United States--Politics and government--1981-1989. 2. United States--Foreign relations--1981-1989. 3. Reagan, Ronald. I. Johns, Andrew L., 1968--editor.

E876.C653 2015

973.927092-dc23

2014018380

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: President Ronald Reagan after his speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate, West Berlin, June 12, 1987. © AP PHOTO / Ira Schwartz / Press Association

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# **“To Grasp and Hold a Vision” Ronald Reagan in Historical Perspective**

Andrew L. Johns

In his farewell address to the American people in January 1989, Ronald Reagan highlighted what he considered to be his greatest achievement during his two terms as president of the United States: “We stood, again, for freedom. I know we always have, but in the past few years the world again—and in a way, we ourselves—rediscovered it...we've made a difference...America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership” (Reagan, 1989). For Reagan, nothing could be more significant or a more fitting epitaph to his tenure in office; for, if the United States stood once more as the beacon of hope, the standard of liberty, and the guardian of freedom for the world, then he had accomplished his mission as his country's leader.

In the quarter century since he left the White House, however, the question of whether Reagan's presidency and legacy should be considered a success, a failure, or somewhere in between has been a matter of contentious debate by historians, partisans, and pundits alike. This should not be surprising. Ronald Reagan's life (1911–2004) spanned the most important and divisive domestic and international events of the twentieth century. His rhetoric transformed the national political conversation in the United States. He harnessed and came to personify the rise of the conservative movement that challenged the supremacy of the liberal consensus, which dated from the New Deal. His administration represented a pivotal moment in American history; the 1980s witnessed a