

Good riddance, Ronnie Reagan

By Greg Palast

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You're not going to like this. You shouldn't speak ill of the dead. But in this case, someone's got to. Ronald Reagan was a conman. Reagan was a coward. Reagan was a killer.

In 1987, I found myself stuck in a crappy little town in Nicaragua named Chaguitillo. The people were kind enough, though hungry, except for one surly young man. His wife had just died of tuberculosis. People don't die of TB if they get some antibiotics. But Ronald Reagan, big-hearted guy that he was, had put a lock-down embargo on medicine to Nicaragua because he didn't like the government that the people there had elected.

Ronnie grinned and cracked jokes while the young woman's lungs filled up and she stopped breathing. Reagan flashed that B-movie grin while they buried the mother of three.

And when Hezbollah terrorists struck and murdered hundreds of American marines in their sleep in Lebanon, the TV warrior ran away like a whipped dog ... then turned around and invaded Grenada. That little Club Med war was a murderous PR stunt so Ronnie could hold parades for gunning down Cubans building an airport.

I remember Nancy, a skull and crossbones prancing around in designer dresses, some of the "gifts" that flowed to the Reagans – from hats to million-dollar homes – from cronies well compensated with government loot. It used to be called bribery.

And all the while, Grandpa grinned, the grandfather who bleated on about "family values" but didn't bother to see his own grandchildren.

The New York Times today, in its canned obit, wrote that Reagan projected, "faith in small town America" and "old-time values." "Values" my ass. It was union busting and a declaration of war on the poor and anyone who couldn't buy designer dresses. It was the New Meanness, bringing starvation back to America so that every millionaire could get another million.

"Small town" values? From the movie star of the Pacific Palisades, the Malibu mogul? I want to throw up.

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And all the while, in the White House basement, as his brain boiled away, his last conscious act was to condone a coup d'état against our elected Congress. Reagan's Defense Secretary Casper the Ghost Weinberger with the crazed Colonel, Ollie North, plotted to give guns to the Monster of the Mideast, Ayatolla Khomeini.

Reagan's boys called Jimmy Carter a weanie and a wuss although Carter wouldn't give an inch to the Ayatolla. Reagan, with that film-fantasy tough-guy con in front of cameras, went begging like a coward cockroach to Khomeini pleading on bended knee for the release of our hostages. Ollie North flew into Iran with a birthday cake for the maniac mullah – no kidding – in the shape of a key. The key to Ronnie's heart.

Then the Reagan roaches mixed their cowardice with crime: taking cash from the hostage-takers to buy guns for the "contras" – the drug-runners of Nicaragua posing as freedom fighters.

I remember as a student in Berkeley the words screeching out of the bullhorn, "The Governor of the State of California, Ronald Reagan, hereby orders this demonstration to disburse" ... and then came the teargas and the truncheons. And all the while, that fang-hiding grin from the Gipper.

In Chaguitillo, all night long, the farmers stayed awake to guard their kids from attack from Reagan's Contra terrorists. The farmers weren't even Sandinistas, those 'Commies' that our cracked-brained President told us were 'only a 48-hour drive from Texas.' What the hell would they want with Texas, anyway?

Nevertheless, the farmers, and their families, were Ronnie's targets.

In the deserted darkness of Chaguitillo, a TV blared. Weirdly, it was that third-rate gangster movie, "Brother Rat." Starring Ronald Reagan.

Well, my friends, you can rest easier tonight: the Rat is dead.

Killer, coward, conman. Ronald Reagan, good-bye and good riddance.

Greg Palast is author of the New York Times bestseller, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy.