

## Deadheads and Reagan's America in the 1980s

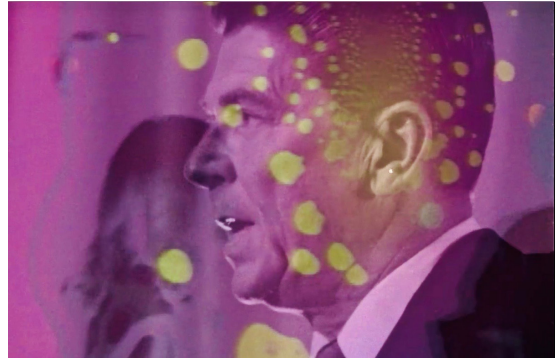
### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who are the Deadheads and how did their lifestyle contrast with the conservative values promoted by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s?

#### OVERVIEW

During their thirty year career releasing recordings and performing concerts around the world, the Grateful Dead established a legion of fans. Within this fanbase are the Deadheads, a unique group defined by their demonstrative passion for and connection to the band's recorded music and live performances—a devotion surpassing that of the casual Grateful Dead listener and concertgoer. For example, Deadheads often took to the road, indulging in a nomadic pilgrimage that found them following the band on tour and attending numerous shows per year. Over time, Deadheads became fixtures of the Grateful Dead concert experience, spawning a dynamic community that became omnipresent at each tour stop.



Beyond their role in the Grateful Dead rolling roadshow, the wandering Deadhead community is often associated with ideals and traditions developed in the 1950s and 1960s counterculture movement—a whimsical outlook on life often defined by a rejection of established American social norms. Even in the 1980s, an era defined by the conservatism of President Ronald Reagan, the Grateful Dead saw a surge in popularity as a new generation of fans began to attend the band's shows and model the nomadic Deadhead journey. This uptick in the band's popularity provided a unique contrast between these two American cultural experiences.

Ronald Reagan's landslide election victory in the 1980 United States presidential campaign represented a shift in American politics and society. A former governor of California, Reagan and his conservative allies celebrated the post-war conservatism of 1950s America and emphasized a return to traditionalism, presenting a nostalgic view of America before the tumult of the 1960s and 1970s. As Grateful Dead publicist Dennis McNally states in *Long Strange Trip*, "Ronald Reagan is president in the 80s and the great reaction had begun—the reaction against the 60s."

President Reagan's successful campaign was designed to appeal to discouraged voters around the country and part of his methodology was denigrating 1960s counterculture, and its associated communities. As McNally states in *Long Strange Trip*, "Ronald Reagan ran as governor and president against the 1960s. And it worked." Reagan promoted a particular American lifestyle, and he juxtaposed and praised his version over that of alternative lifestyles like those practiced by the Deadheads.

In this lesson, students will examine how the Deadhead lifestyle contrasts with the conservative version promoted by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s by analyzing clips from *Long Strange Trip* as well as historical documents, images, and videos.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The Deadhead community and their subculture of fandom for the Grateful Dead
- President Ronald Reagan's historic election victory in 1980
- The similarities and differences between the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia and President Ronald Reagan
- President Ronald Reagan's particular set of promoted "family values" and whether those values can also be practiced by alternative communities like the Deadheads

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to compare the Deadhead lifestyle and culture with concurrent conservative American values promoted by President Ronald Reagan by examining footage from the film *Long Strange Trip*, maps, and historical artifacts.

## ACTIVITIES

### ENTRY TICKET ACTIVITY

1. Have students read the selected biographies in **Handout 1 – Ronald Reagan & Jerry Garcia**. Ask each student to arrive to class ready to share as many similarities and differences about each that they can identify.

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Invite students to take turns sharing one similarity and one difference they identified between Reagan and Garcia. Write the responses on the board at the front of the classroom, organized into columns of "Similarities" and "Differences." Save the responses to revisit and review at the end of the lesson. Ask students:
  - Noticing in particular the differences between Reagan and Garcia, might they have a different set of values that inform their individual lives? What might those values be?
  - Might their supporters also have a different set of values?
  - Could those who approve of Reagan's political views also support Garcia's artistic work?

## PROCEDURE:

### 1. Play, **Clip 1, “Not the Band, but Deadheads.”**

Ask students:

- According to Grateful Dead publicist Dennis McNally, why did journalists first want to cover the Grateful Dead in the 1980s?
- At Grateful Dead concerts, what did journalists find to be more interesting than the band?
- Who are the Deadheads?
- How might the Deadheads be different from other fans of the Grateful Dead?
- Why might someone want to be a Deadhead?
- Considering the 1980s Deadheads seen in the clip, how might you characterize their community according to age, gender, economic status, etc.? Is it difficult to characterize Deadheads by this criteria? Why or why not? What might these characterizations say about Deadheads and the Grateful Dead in the 1980s?
- Might the Deadheads remind you of any other fangroup communities? If so, which ones? Might these groups share similar characteristics?

### 2. Display, **Image 1: 1980 US Presidential Election Electoral College Map** (Numbers attached to each state are the respective electoral votes that a candidate received for that state.) Ask students:

- Looking at the image, which candidate won the election? How did you determine the winner? What do the numbers listed with each state signify?

- Did the winning candidate win by a significant amount in comparison to their opponent?
- Might candidate Ronald Reagan's victory lead you to conclude that voters supported his campaign themes and values over those of his opponent? Do you know any of those values?

### 3. Play students **Clip 2, President Reagan's Radio Address to the Nation on the American Family.**

Ask students:

- What might President Reagan mean when he says that we may not be able to “go back to the old family ways”? What might those “family ways” be according to him? Do you think his version of “family ways” are the same as others? Why might he be nostalgic for “the old family ways”?
- Why might President Reagan feel it necessary to “preserve family values”? How might his list of “family values” (faith, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, kindness, and love) contrast with those of the Deadheads? Might both Reagan and the Deadheads share some of those values? If so, which ones? Why?
- What might President Reagan mean when he says that his administration will keep “trying to create a better life for those who follow” those values? What particular groups of people might he be referring to as followers of those values? Might he be excluding those that don't “follow” those values? Might the Deadheads be excluded from the group of “those who follow” Reagan's values? If so, why?

- Considering President Reagan's address in total, how might his views contrast with those of the Deadheads that you just learned about in the previous video? Why might they contrast each other? What might be biasing your opinion?
4. Distribute **Handout 2 - The Television Family in the '80s** and organize students into small groups to have them discuss and answer the questions in the handout. Students will need to select a scribe from their group to notate the group's answers. Once completed, ask students to present their group's answers to the class. After group presentations, ask students:
- Do you think all of the families from these television shows followed the family values (faith, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, kindness, and love) President Reagan expressed in his radio address from 1984? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - Do you think a family must identify as "conservative" like President Reagan did in order to follow these values? Can you think of groups that aren't families that may follow these values?
5. Display **Image 2: Yuppie Handbook** cover. Explain to students that the character Alex Keaton from the 1980s show *Family Ties* would proudly identify (and be labeled by society in the 1980s) as a Yuppie. Provide the background on the term by explaining that the term "Yuppie" was purposefully borrowed and modified from the 1960s counterculture term "Hippie" as a statement against the values of the counterculture. Ask students:
- What impressions might you get from this illustration of Yuppies?
  - Their belongings are specifically labeled with brands — do you get the idea that these are the "right" or "ideal" things to do, own, wear, etc.? What would be considered the opposite?
  - Might a Yuppie only be from a particular demographic? Can you list the characteristics of that demographic?
  - Are we supposed to aspire to be like Yuppies? Why or why not?
  - Why might the Deadheads want to reject this culture? Might it be possible to be a Deadhead and a Yuppie?
  - Does the figure of the Yuppie exist today? If so, what characteristics might define them and how might they be similar or different than the Yuppies of the 1980s?
6. Tell students they will now view a clip where the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia specifically comments on the band's fan culture during the 1980s and how the Deadhead experience of following the band on tour from show to show had a particular significance during this decade. Play **Clip 3 "New Lame America."** Ask students:
- As the clip explains, the band's following in the 1980s began to include young people who weren't even alive during the Dead's early years. Why might Grateful Dead music and culture attract new fans in the 1980s?
  - Why might these new fans in the 1980s become Deadheads and embrace the traditions of that particular community: following the Grateful Dead on tour, communing with other Deadheads and fans of the group, and attending as many shows as possible?
  - How might the social and cultural norms promoted by President Reagan during

the 1980s have influenced people to embrace alternative lifestyles and communities like the Deadheads?

- Might the appeal of these alternative lifestyles and communities contrast with Reagan's defined "family values"? Why or why not?
- What did Grateful Dead guitarist and vocalist Jerry Garcia think was appealing about the band? (Prompt students to recognize that Garcia argued that the Grateful Dead cultural experience might offer an opportunity for "adventure.")
- Why might young people in the 1980s in particular have been looking for an adventure? Might their seeking of adventure have been influenced by President Reagan's promotion of "following" "family values"? Might it be possible to have an adventure and still follow those values?

(faith, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, kindness, and love), might the author have been able to follow those values and also be a Deadhead? Why or why not?

- What particular aspect of the author's life noted in the article might conclude that she does follow those values?
- Considering the content in the article and the previously viewed video clip, "New Lane America," might it still be possible to have an "adventure" in America? What else was the author seeking with her journey besides an adventure?
- In what ways might the author view her Deadhead experience besides traveling the country to attend music concerts?
- Are there any other cultural traditions that you can think of that require someone to make a journey for specific purposes?

7. Distribute, **Handout 3 - "Communing with the Dead,"** and read as a class. Ask students:

- Considering the content in the article and President Reagan's list of family values

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Deadheads are still around today, but how do you think the Deadhead phenomenon would be covered in the news if it were new today? What similarities do you see between the cultural and political climate of today and the 1980s? How do Deadheads relate to today's "Stan" culture?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Read "My Disciplinarian Father, the Deadhead" (Mel magazine, June 13, 2016). Write an essay answering the following question: What do you take away from the article's portrait of Grateful Dead fandom, family and community, and how the values followed by the father in the article relate to Deadhead culture and President Reagan's promotion of family values?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Craft and Structure 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Text Types and Purposes 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)*

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Language 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.



Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in a word meaning.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

## **NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices



## NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)

### *Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- *Long Strange Trip* - “Not the Band, But the Deadheads”
- *Long Strange Trip* - President Reagan’s Radio Address to the Nation on the American Family
- *Long Strange Trip* - “New Lame America”

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Ronald Reagan & Jerry Garcia
- Handout 2 - The Television Family in the ‘80s



# Lesson Materials



Image 1, 1980 US Presidential Election Electoral College Map

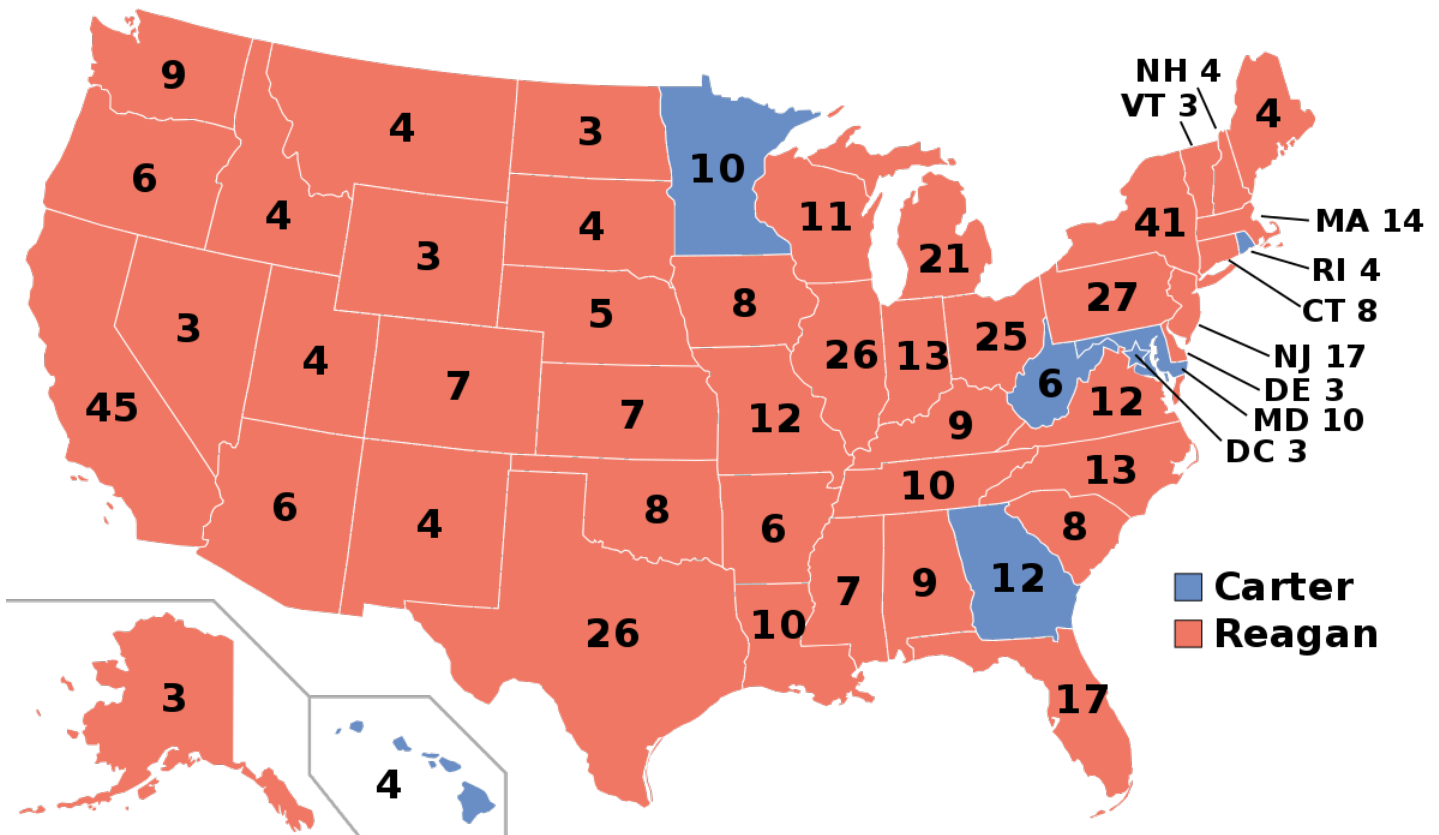
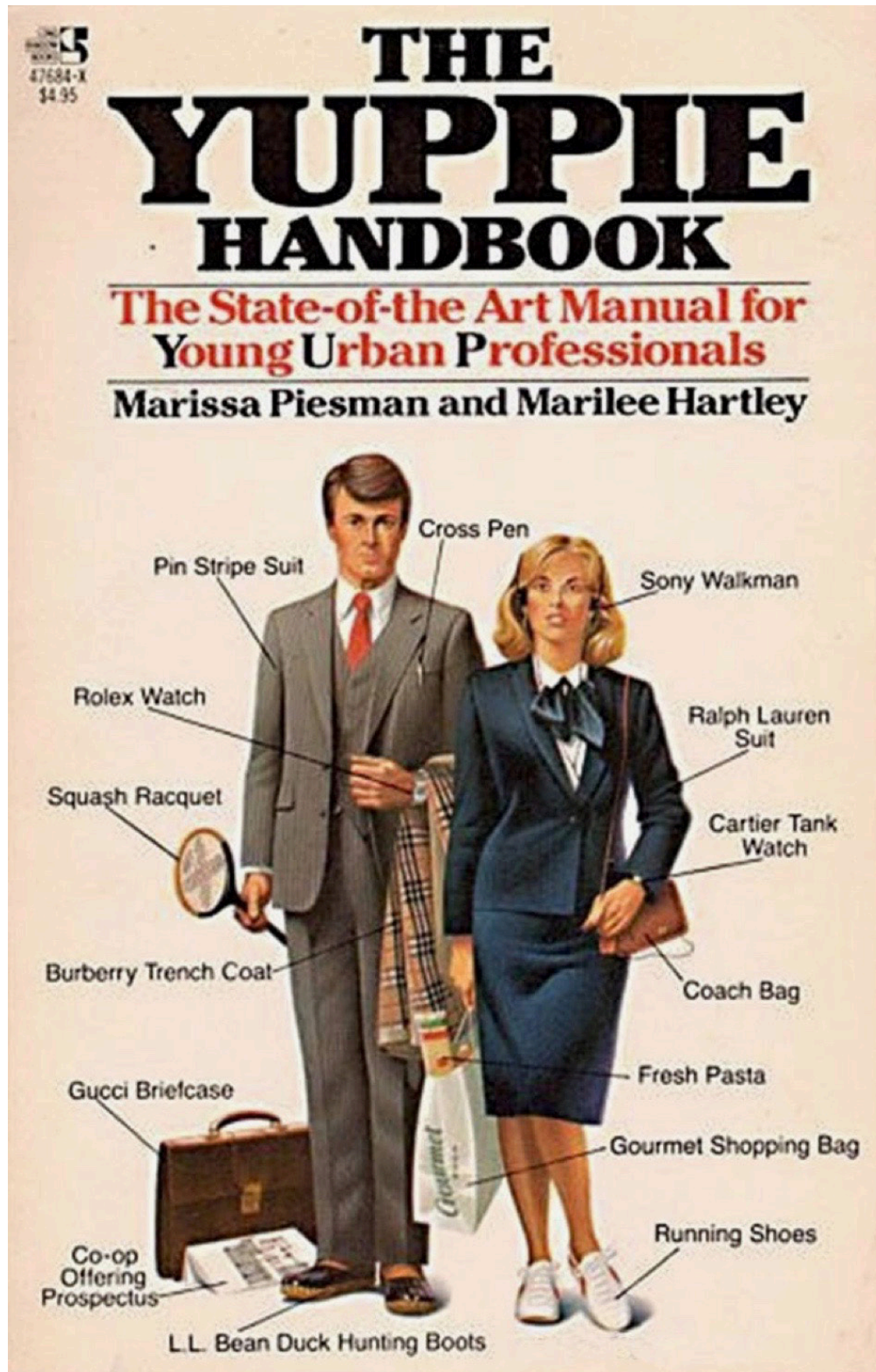


Image 2, Yuppie Handbook Cover





## Handout 1 - Biographies of Ronald Reagan and Jerry Garcia

### *Biography of Ronald Reagan*

Ronald Reagan, originally an American actor and politician, became the 40th President of the United States serving from 1981 to 1989. His term saw a restoration of prosperity at home, with the goal of achieving “peace through strength” abroad.

On February 6, 1911, Ronald Wilson Reagan was born to Nelle and John Reagan in Tampico, Illinois. He attended high school in nearby Dixon and then worked his way through Eureka College. Upon graduation, he became a radio sports announcer. A screen test in 1937 won him a contract in Hollywood. During the next two decades he appeared in 53 films.

From his first marriage to actress Jane Wyman, he had two children, Maureen and Michael. In 1952 he married Nancy Davis, who was also an actress, and they had two children, Patricia Ann and Ronald Prescott.

As president of the Screen Actors Guild, Reagan became embroiled in disputes over the issue of Communism in the film industry; his political views shifted from liberal to conservative. He toured the country as a television host, becoming a spokesman for conservatism. In 1966 he was elected Governor of California by a margin of a million votes; he was re-elected in 1970.

Ronald Reagan won the Republican Presidential nomination in 1980 and chose as his running mate former Texas Congressman and United Nations Ambassador George Bush. Voters swept the Republican ticket into office. Reagan won 489 electoral votes to 49 for President Jimmy Carter.

On January 20, 1981, Reagan took office. Dealing skillfully with Congress, Reagan obtained legislation to stimulate economic growth, curb inflation, increase employment, and strengthen national defense. He embarked upon a course of cutting taxes and Government expenditures, refusing to deviate from it when the strengthening of defense forces led to a large deficit.

A renewal of national self-confidence by 1984 helped Reagan and Bush win a second term with an unprecedented number of electoral votes. Their victory turned away Democratic challengers Walter F. Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro.

In foreign policy, Reagan sought to achieve “peace through strength.” During his two terms he increased defense spending 35 percent, but sought to improve relations with the Soviet Union. In dramatic meetings with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, he negotiated a treaty that would eliminate intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

At the end of his two terms in office, Ronald Reagan viewed with satisfaction the achievements of his innovative program known as the Reagan Revolution, which aimed to reinvigorate the American people and reduce their reliance upon Government. He felt he had fulfilled his campaign pledge of 1980 to restore “the great, confident roar of American progress and growth and optimism.”

*Excerpted from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/ronald-reagan>*

## *Biography of Jerry Garcia*

August 1, 1942: Jerome John “Jerry” Garcia is born in San Francisco, CA.

1950: Jerry attends Monroe Elementary School, and is greatly encouraged in his artistic abilities by his third grade teacher. It is during this time that Jerry picks up the five-string banjo.

1953: Garcia is introduced to early rock & roll and rhythm & blues by his brother.

August 1, 1957: On his fifteenth birthday, Jerry receives an accordion. Disappointed, he complains until the instrument is exchanged for an electric guitar and amplifier.

1960: Hoping to see the world, Jerry enlists in the US Army at age seventeen, and completes basic combat training at Fort Ord near Monterey on the Pacific Coast. Jerry is discharged from the Army only months after joining, on the basis of “lack of suitability to the military lifestyle.”

1961: Jerry narrowly survives a major car accident which changes his focus. He later cites it as a “sling-shot for the rest of [his] life.” This revelation causes him to choose the guitar over his hobby of painting and drawing.

1964: Jerry, Ron “Pigpen” McKernan, and Bob Weir join forces as Mother McCree’s Uptown Jug Champions.

1965: Phil Lesh and Bill Kreutzmann join Jerry, Pigpen, and Bob to perform their first gig as The Warlocks at Magoo’s Pizza in Menlo Park, CA. The Warlocks change their name to the Grateful Dead.

1966: Jerry and the rest of the band move into a communal house situated at 710 Ashbury Street. It becomes a fixture on the local music scene—providing a venue for many free concerts throughout the year-and-a-half they live there.

1985: Jerry’s decade-long heroin addiction culminates in the rest of the Grateful Dead holding an intervention. Given the choice between the band or the drugs, Jerry agrees to check into a rehabilitation center in Oakland, CA.

1986: Jerry lapses into a near-fatal diabetic coma for five days, after which he has to relearn the guitar.

1987: Named in tribute to Jerry, ice cream-makers Ben & Jerry’s release Cherry Garcia.

1994: The Grateful Dead is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

August 9, 1995: Jerry dies at Serenity Knolls Treatment Center in Forest Knolls, CA, at age fifty-three.

August 13, 1995: Jerry is celebrated by twenty-five thousand family and friends at a public memorial in Golden Gate Park. Memorials span the nation as people all over mourn his passing.



## Handout 2 - The Television Family in the '80s

With the influence of resurgent conservative values in American culture during the 1980s, television programs reflected these popular cultural norms and returned to placing a focus on “traditional” family units—similar to the proliferation of 1950s programs like *Leave It To Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*. These new shows were often based on a traditional format of the family: a heterosexual married couple comprised of a man and woman with several traditionally gender-defined children. Shows like *Family Ties* and *Growing Pains* were very successful, existing for several broadcast seasons and achieving high ratings by maintaining a large number of viewers throughout the decade.

However, these 1980s television families often had a twist that illustrated the evolution and changes in the American family over the past several decades. For example, the father character on *Growing Pains* had a home office where he worked during the day to help raise his children since the mother on the show was now working outside the home as a news reporter, not a narrative you would have likely found in 1950s television shows. Even more of-the-times, the very popular *Family Ties* brought the contrast between American conservative identity and the lingering 1960s counterculture community right into the American living room. A significant aspect of the show’s premise and appeal was the relationship between the ex-Hippie parents and their Reagan-idolizing son, Alex P. Keaton.

Students should answer the attached questions below after reading the paragraph above and viewing the promo photos on the following page from these 1980s and 1950s television shows featuring “traditional” families.

1. What similarities do you see between the families represented on television in the 1950s and 1980s? (Notice the number of children, etc.)
2. What differences do you see between the families represented on television in the 1950s and 1980s? (Notice where the parents are located in the family photo, what members of the family are wearing, etc.)
3. Considering the paragraph, and in particular the show *Family Ties*, what similarities do you notice between the father characters in the 1950s shows and the son character from *Family Ties*?
4. From viewing these images, how might American television culture in the 1980s reflect Reagan’s idea of “family values”?
5. Comparing how American culture was represented on television during these two periods, how had America changed? How had it stayed the same?
6. Comparing how American culture was represented on television during these two periods with the types of families you might see on television today, how has America changed? How has it stayed the same?

1950s "Family" television shows: *Leave it to Beaver* (Left) and *Father Knows Best* (right)



1980s "Family" television shows: *Family Ties* (Left) and *Growing Pains* (Right)

