

CHAPTER 19

Confronting Reagan on Astrology
Eight Years Too Early

Governor Reagan's interest in astrology and fortune-telling is spotted in 1980 during his run for the presidency. After an investigation, a letter is secured from Presidential Candidate Reagan denying that he lets astrology influence his life—a denial ultimately proven quite wrong but one that, ironically, might have served the Republic well.

In the spring of 1988, when advance P.R. stories about former chief of staff Donald Regan's memoirs began to circulate, I received a call from the McNeill-Lehrer News Hour. In the news business today, with modern technology, nothing is ever lost. Accordingly, the staffers knew that I had inspired small news stories, eight years before that candidate for president Ronald Reagan believed in astrology. Would I appear on the show to discuss the new disclosures about the president and his wife? On this bizarre issue, after years of waiting patiently beside my phone, I finally made it onto the most important news show in America.

It all began with a syndicated article in *The Washington Post* on July 13, 1980, by Angela Fox Dunn suggesting that Ronald Reagan was superstitious, consulted horoscopes, and believed in clairvoyance and fortune-telling. For example, Reagan thought that 80 percent of the people in New York's Hall of Fame were Aquarians like him. He also talked of Jeane Dixon as having a "foretelling" part of her mind and quoted a prediction she made about him that had come true.

I then called America's most famous clairvoyant, Jeane Dixon, who

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gave me a twenty-five-minute interview. She had told Reagan that his “ultimate destination on this earth” was to be president and that he was the reincarnation of someone who had been a great American and a great leader.

Thus apprised, I wrote to Reagan, conveying a letter endorsed by five Nobel Prize winners, saying that, as scientists we were “gravely disturbed” that he might believe in astrology and fortune-telling. We asked that he clarify his position since we did not believe a person whose decisions were based even in part on such “evident fantasies” could be trusted with the grave responsibilities of the American presidency.^[333]

Our subsequent investigation revealed that the leading astrologer in Las Vegas had been getting phone calls from the Sacramento White House asking for advice until the astrologer had asked for the exact moment of birth of the (unknown) person involved. Then the calls stopped. (Apparently, no one knows the exact time of day Reagan was born.)³³⁴

We also found a newspaper story in *The Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* asserting that the syndicated astrologer Joyce Jillson, a featured columnist in *The Chicago Sun Times*, had been paid several thousand dollars by the Republican National Committee for an astrological rundown on the prospects of a half dozen of the prospective vice-presidential candidates. (According to a later story, these were done in a rush so that Reagan could take them with him on a vacation to Mexico, where he went to rest before the Republican National Convention.)³³⁵

We called Jillson in 1980, and her husband, a lawyer, returned the call. He said his wife was a very *professional* astrologer and would never normally breach a confidence. In this case, she had thought that the Reagans wanted this known because so many people read the astrology columns that it would help him get votes by showing he had the “common touch.”

On August 27, 1980, with the presidential election only two months away, Reagan sent me the following letter:

“EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY”

Let me assure you that while Nancy and I enjoy glancing at the daily astrology charts in our morning paper (when we are home, which isn't too often these days), we do not plan our daily activities or our lives around them.

I can honestly tell you they have never played a part in decisions I have to make nor will they.

I'm afraid there will be many things written about me in the next four months which will be more fiction than fact.

Thanks again and warm personal regards,

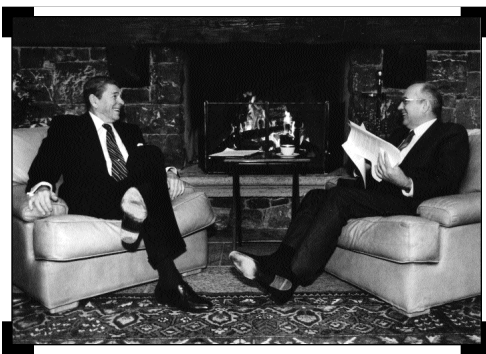
Sincerely,

Ronald Reagan³³⁶

Apparently, this was completely untrue, even when it was written in late August. Nancy Reagan tried to advise the press that her interest in astrology had arisen only after the attempt on President Reagan's life in 1981. But the astrologer Joan Quigley, in her memoir, refers to the Reagans' use of her astrological expertise “during the crucial last three months of the campaign” in 1980—which would include August.³³⁷

Quigley claimed influence on the Reagans in two significant ways: first, in influencing Ronald Reagan's schedule, and second, in influencing their attitudes toward Gorbachev.

For the first claim, she has the firm support of Donald Regan,



Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev working together, as the astrologer Joan Quigley predicted they would

President Reagan's chief of staff, who wrote, “The President's schedule and therefore his life and the most important business of the American nation was largely under the control of the First Lady's astrologer.”³³⁸ This must have been very annoying to Regan, and to Mike Deaver and Howard Baker before him.^[339]

But the traditional interest of

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astrologers—and their credulous clients—in auspicious moments and days may not have much effect in shaping reality. The president, after all, is an eight-hundred-pound gorilla who can sleep wherever he wants and whenever he wants. If he wants a particular date, he can have it. The astrologer does not, by insisting on some auspicious moment, prevent the occasion itself from occurring.

But it was on the question of Gorbachev that Quigley—if she is to be believed—may have been quite influential. Some excerpts from her book give the flavor:

“Mercury in Aquarius likes ideas. Gorbachev’s openness to new ideas is phenomenal!” I repeated this many times in different ways in an effort to convince her [Nancy Reagan]. . . . I finally convinced her that despite the way Russian leaders used to be, Gorbachev was different. I warned her repeatedly that it would be disastrous for Ronnie to go to Geneva with mistaken preconceptions and his old outmoded bias.

“I know you are right,” Nancy said. “But it won’t be easy to change Ronnie. First, I’ll have to persuade him. You know as well as I do how he feels about Russian leaders. I’ll have to make him realize what you say about Gorbachev is true.”³⁴⁰

How much of this is true or even, for that matter, important? As far as the truth is concerned, Quigley appears to be a typical California flake. And what she claims was her assessment of Gorbachev—an appraisal with which I totally agree—is quite consistent with her general philosophy. Indeed, when the Gorbachev foundation brought Gorbachev to the Fairmont Hotel in the fall of 1995, I saw the whole spectrum of Californian new age philosophers holding him in enormous esteem. Quigley’s own attitude toward Russia had been shaped by an invaluable trip to Moscow. In her case, all it took was a veteran of the Bolshevik revolution approaching her in Red Square and asserting, in the standard terms, “The Russian people don’t want war, we want to be friends with the Americans.”³⁴¹ But that she persuaded Nancy Reagan of all this, I do find believable.

“EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY”

Whether Nancy Reagan had some effect on her husband, backed by the full weight of a trusted astrologer’s predictions, is harder to say, but it is certainly possible. Now imagine a world in which the Reagans’ reliance on astrology was “busted wide open” in 1980 by the press, perhaps based on some report from an organization like ours. Since many people are vaguely interested in astrology and few consider it evil, this might not have cost him the election. But it might have suppressed the Reagans’ readiness to consult an astrologer. And this might have been for the worse, if Quigley did, indeed, have any influence on his attitude toward Gorbachev.

In sum, the Reagan affair with Quigley illustrates the unpredictability of political reality. Actions that seem to cut one way can cut another, even without taking into consideration the opposing forces that every political action evokes.