

RONALD REAGAN

A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

EXCERPT FROM REAGAN'S SPEECH "A TIME FOR CHOOSING," OCTOBER 27, 1964.

Full text is available online at <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3405>

In 1964, Ronald Reagan delivered this speech on national television in support of Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater.

[T]his idea that government is beholden to the people, that it has no other source of power except the sovereign people, is still the newest and the most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man.

This is the issue of this election: Whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves.

You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well, I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There's only an up or down—[up] man's old—old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. And regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course.

In this vote-harvesting time, they use terms like the "Great Society," or as we were told a few days ago by the President, we must accept a greater government activity in the affairs of the people. But they've been a little more explicit in the past and among themselves; and all of the things I now will quote have appeared in print. These are not Republican accusations. For example, they have voices that say, "The cold war will end through our acceptance of a not undemocratic socialism." Another voice says, "The profit motive has become outmoded. It must be replaced by the incentives of the welfare state." Or, "Our traditional system of individual freedom is incapable of solving the complex problems of the twentieth century." Senator Fulbright has said at Stanford University that the Constitution is outmoded. He referred to the President as "our moral teacher and our leader," and he says he is "hobbled in his task by the restrictions of power imposed on him by this antiquated document." He must "be freed," so that he "can do for us" what he knows "is best." And Senator Clark of Pennsylvania, another articulate spokesman, defines liberalism as "meeting the material needs of the masses through the full power of centralized government."

Well, I, for one, resent it when a representative of the people refers to you and me, the free men and women of this country, as "the masses." This is a term we haven't applied to ourselves in America. But beyond that, "the full power of centralized government"—this was the very thing the Founding Fathers sought to minimize. They knew that governments don't control things. A government can't control the economy without controlling people. And they know when a government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose. They also knew, those Founding Fathers, that outside of its legitimate functions, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector of the economy.

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QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. According to Reagan, what is unique about the American government?
2. According to Reagan, why would voting for President Johnson be like “abandon[ing] the American revolution?”
3. While the title of this address is “A Time for Choosing,” it was also simply known as “The Speech” because Reagan had been delivering slightly different versions of the this speech to conservative business interests for several years. Name two elements of the speech that would appeal to conservative interests.
4. What did Reagan believe was the central issue in the election of 1964?
5. According to Reagan, Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society offered American society a trade-off. By gaining security through the “full power of centralized government,” what do Americans lose?
6. If the American public accepted that trade, what did Reagan believe would be the outcome?
7. Reagan argues that the Founding Fathers sought to minimize “the full power of centralized government.” Why, according to Reagan, did they do so?

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