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You and I have a rendezvous with Destiny. We'll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on Earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness. We will keep in mind and remember that Barry Goldwater has faith in us. He has faith that you and I have the ability and the dignity and the right to make our own decisions and determine our own destiny.

Thank you very much. That Dominic was, of course, Ronald Reagan, giving what I think, and you would be the person who'd know this because you've actually taught this. Isn't this known as the speech?

The speech, given in 1964 for Barry Goldwater, the Republican nominee for president. So this was the moment that really catapulted Reagan onto the political stage.

I mean, this speech was an absolute, I mean, Goldwater went down to a terrible defeat, but is now often seen as the sort of herald of Reagan's brand of conservatism.

But it was this speech that brought Reagan to the attention of a lot of rich businessmen in California that basically won him indirectly.

The governorship of California has set him on the path of the presidency. And you delivered that, Tom, with all the earnestness.

Well, I mean, you know, in so many ways, he was an old ham. And I like that.

So identify with that. Yeah. So we left Reagan his acting career in the doldrums. And I had always kind of wondered basically how he got from his acting career to becoming governor of California. And basically, this episode is all about explaining how and why. But at the end of the last episode, we left it on a particular cliffhanger, which was that he'd got divorced from Jane Wyman, who basically divorced him

because she fell up with him endlessly going on about all the stuff he'd read in the Readers Digest.

Yes. And he then played the town with a number of ladies who he called his cocospanials.

Well, some of them, Tom, were quite young. Well, so there's some gossip, God, I must at some point says, we never thought we'd say this, but Ronnie Reagan is playing the wolf or something like that. Isn't that the expression they use? The old dog. There's life in the old dog yet.

Yeah. But the thing is, he's almost, what is he? He's almost 40.

And he doesn't really like it, does he? Because he's naturally, he likes to settle down with a good woman.

Exactly. But he's sort of playing the field. He has a lot of girlfriends, a young actress called Piper Laurie, who I think was 18, and then wrote a memoir in the 1980s saying...

Yes, so that's very Leonardo DiCaprio behavior.

Very Leonardo DiCaprio behavior, saying this was the first encounter she'd had with a man of any kind, and Reagan old enough to be her father.

And was he nice?

Did she like him or did he think he was a perv or what?

I don't think she was, I don't think she went into kind of immense detail about the encounter. I don't think she was presenting him in a terribly bad light.

I think now, people are very down on Leonardo DiCaprio about his dating patterns, aren't they?

Yes.

But Reagan himself was, you're right, it wasn't really him.

He wasn't a gigolo.

No, he was playing the field, but it didn't come naturally, should we say.

Yes.

And actually that made him the perfect, somebody is eyeing him up, and that is Nancy, Nancy Davis.

So Nancy, she had a gorgeous mother. Have you seen the photo of her?

Edith Wackett, yeah.

Yeah, absolutely stunning.

Yeah.

Because so often, you see photographs of women who are described as famous beauties in period photos, and they did.

Or did men, Tom?

Yeah.

No, but since we're on the subject of Nancy's mother.

Yeah.

But Nancy's mother, look, I mean, fabulous.

Yes.

She's a very appealing sounding person.

Edith Lockett.

Yes.

She goes around doing her kind of stage shows and singing, and she's a great figure on the stage, and she has a...

She marries a surgeon.

She marries a surgeon called Loyal Davis.

Yeah.

So we mentioned at the end of the last episode, the names and the next sequence of Reagan's story are wholly improbable.

I mean, if you read them in a novel, you wouldn't believe them.

No.

So Loyal Davis.

Loyal Davis.

And actually Nancy is not Loyal Davis's daughter, but she adopts Loyal Davis's name, doesn't she?

She calls herself Nancy Davis.

And she's a debutante.

So she's from a very different background from Dutch Reagan growing up in his sort of fairly impecunious small towns in the Midwest.

She is a debutante in Chicago, and she goes to Smith College, one of the seven sisters, this very sort of fancy women's college.

And in her senior class, do you know the part she played in the senior class play?

Titania.

No, she played the wife of a president of the United States.

Did she?

Yeah.

An imaginary president or a real one?

An imaginary president, I think.

Right.

Okay.

I don't know.

I didn't dig down that deep.

Okay.

And she wants to be an actress, doesn't she?

Like her mum.

Because her mum's very famous.

Yeah, but she's nowhere near as good.

I mean, she's nowhere near as good as her mum.

Or indeed, she's not as good a performer as Ronald Reagan is.

So she goes to Hollywood and she gets in with the guy who's in charge of casting at MGM.

It's called Benny Fowl, who is regarded, he is regarded.

He is the sultan of the casting couch.

Is he?

Yeah.

I'm not sure the sultan is the word I was looking for, but he is the, he's the king of the casting couch.

The Khan of the casting couch.

Khan of the casting couch.

The great Khan of the casting couch.

Okay.

Okay.

He is the great Khan.

He's the despot of the casting couch.

And it was later very un-gallantly said of Nancy that she had basically slept her way to a contract.

I don't know whether that's true or not.

There's definitely a perception of her from the very beginning that she's incredibly ambitious and she's a bit of a woman on the make.

And she obviously identifies, you know, Ron Reagan, in his capacity as the head of the Screen Actors Guild, because she has accidentally been put on not a blacklist, but a kind of a gray list as people with kind of lefty sympathies, which she absolutely does.

And she contacts him and says, please take my, you know, use your influence to get my name off this list.

And they end up going for dinner and, you know, one thing leads to another.

And she, unlike Jane Wyman, loves listening to Ronnie wang on.

About the Reed Stardust.

All that kind of stuff.

Yeah.

And she just kind of gazes up at him adoringly, doesn't she?

I think she absolutely does.

She absolutely does.

So she puts pressure on him, I think, to get married.

She's pregnant when they get married.

So that's February 1952, she falls pregnant and they get married in March.

And really interesting and a real surprise for me is that before they choose the date, they consult an astrologer, Carol Reiter, the astrologer to the stars.

And, and it's Reagan who pushes that.

Yes.

So it's not an, everyone thinks that Nancy is kind of, you know, enthralled by astrology, but actually she embraces it because Ronald Reagan is already into astrology as a lot of Hollywood stars are in the fifties.

You know, that, that vogue, everyone now has a therapist, don't they?

In Hollywood.

Well, everyone had an, went to see the astrologer in those days.

I mean, maybe they were getting into therapy as well.

So, so wasn't Nancy into it before she met Reagan?

Do you think?

I'm not sure that she was.

I mean, all the stuff about the astrology, which I had sort of imagined was cooked up.

I'd always thought it was exaggerated by Kitty Kelly.

And I mean, Don Regan, who is Reagan's chief of staff in the mid eighties.

He said, Oh, Nancy plans everything that they're astrologer.

And I sort of thought, Oh, that's just gossip and sour grapes, but it's absolutely not.

I mean, the astrology, they take, they take it terribly seriously.

They consult astrologers when they're kind of putting on their trousers or something.

So yeah, they get married.

But in some ways, Reagan looks like a bad investment from her point of view because his film career is pretty much dead by this point.

There's no call for his kind of, I mean, he's a bit old, he's in his forties.

He's not playing the best friend, the hero's best friend anymore.

So is this when he goes to Vegas?

He goes, he does go to Vegas and he hates it.

He absolutely hates it.

Going to Vegas and sort of doing a tour.

Because it's seen as a marker failure because he's, he's kind of hosting cabaret shows.

Exactly.

Hosting cabaret.

He does a two week stint, I think it is.

And he really doesn't like it at all.

It really, he thinks it's tawdry, he thinks humiliating.

And it's at this point, or pretty much at this point that he is approached.

He is, in his capacity at the Screen Actors Guild, he had done a deal to allow his own agency, MCA, to move into TV production.

Previously, agencies were not allowed to get involved in TV production.

He broke as a deal.

And about a year or so later, two years later, MCA come to him.

This guy called Taft Schreiber comes to him and says, we've had an offer for you and I think this is perfect.

So General Electric are sponsoring a program called General Electric Theatre.

It's been running off and on, but they really want to invest in it.

They want to make it a weekly thing and they need a host.

So basically, MCA clients will appear on TV in a, it's an anthology.

They'll appear in a series of plays.

And, you know, we think it will be a ratings topic, be a massive hit and General Electric are going to put in a lot of money.

We need a host to do a two minute introduction to give it a sense of coherence.

But also the host must be a goodwill ambassador for General Electric.

So there will be a lot of work, touring General Electric plants, giving speeches, meeting the workers, being the kind of face of General Electric.

You see, when I read about this, I had not understood that 30 Rock, the Tina Fey sitcom about a comedy show.

And it's all owned by General Electric.

And I had never understood why what General Electric were doing involved in a kind of comedy show.

But now I understand.

So it's obviously a kind of long running tradition in America.

So the firm would sponsor the show. If the firm walked away, the show ends.

That's where the money for the show is coming from.

So General Electric are offering to pay Reagan \$125,000 a year.

That's the equivalent of \$3 million a year today, I would say.

And General Electric have a really, really sort of ruthless and cunning attitude towards advertising and getting their message across.

So you're talking about people having excellent names.

The man running their ad account is called Earl Dunkel.

But the real guiding spirit to manage and charge of their labor relations is Lemuel Bullware.

And Bullwareism, as it's called, involves basically you use your own workers as the advert for your company.

You persuade your own workers of the virtue of your company.

In other words, Bullwareism was you persuade your workers that government intervention regulation have gone too far,

that free enterprise is the American way, free market, all this stuff, anti-communism and low taxes.

And so by this time, Reagan is buying into this.

Oh, yes.

1952 is the first time he votes Republican, right?

Eisenhower, yeah.

And he felt a little bit bad about it because his father had always been such a keen Democrat.

And he actually says at the time there are things about Adley Stevenson, the Democratic candidate that I quite like.

However, it sort of makes sense that Reagan is moving rightwards.

He is rich.

All his friends in Hollywood, the people that he hangs out with, as we were saying before, they're quite right-wing.

Nancy is quite right-wing.

But also he's reading, as you said, the reader's digest.

He's also become absolutely addicted to a periodical called human events, which is, again, very, very firmly right-wing.

So he's being radicalized by mid-market magazines.

Yes, he actually is.

And when he goes to General Electric, that radicalizes him further.

And he, by the way, the interesting thing is not the two-minute introductions to the episodes, it's the tours,

because he turns out to be absolutely brilliant at it.

He will go to the plant.

There is a wonderful description of this in...

Bob Spitz.

Bob Spitz.

Bob Spitz.

He's a writer, so Gary Wills wrote about this in his book, Reagan's America, Innocence at Home in the 80s,

that General Electric was the key to Reagan.

As Bob Spitz describes it, Reagan goes into the plant, and at first people are sort of staring at him.

And his technique is he will usually talk to the women, because they're delighted to see a Hollywood matinee idol,

a film star, and the men are a little bit suspicious.

And then after he's talked to the women and they've all sort of gushed over him,

he then goes over to the men and he makes a few jokes.

He tells them a few jokes about the women often.

And he puts the men at their ease, and very, very quickly they get into kind of banter and gossip, and he tells Hollywood stories.

He's one of the boys.

He has this film star glamour, of course.

He's tanned, and it's tall and whatnot.

But he has such an affable down-to-earth manner.

He's brilliant at putting people at their ease.

He's one of the guys.

He's absolutely one of the boys.

Absolutely.

And then as part of this, he gives after-dinner speeches.

So General Electric starts to organise.

He'll talk to the Rotary Club or the Chamber of Commerce or whatever.

And the speeches that he gives are, he'll start with some jokes and some Hollywood anecdotes and be self-deprecating, and then he'll start talking a little bit about politics,

not in an excessively partisan way.
So in other words, if you're a Democrat, you can still enjoy it.
But he'll say things that lots of people kind of agree with,
in a slightly kind of golf clubby, men at the bar kind of way.
He'll say, we pay a lot of taxes, and what do we get for them?
Those people in Washington, they're all the same.
Don't you just love our country and you hate people running it down?
Communism, we've got to stand up to that.
He'll come out with all this sort of stuff,
and most people will just nod and say, this is great.
And what Reagan does that is brilliant,
and he gets this from readers' digest and whatnot,
is he wraps it up in parables and little stories.
He's increasingly right-wing convictions.
Are they any more sophisticated than, oh, it's terrible,
they're taking all our tax.
They're taking too much tax, commies, they're awful.
Does he have a more sophisticated understanding of geopolitics,
of how the economy works or anything,
or is it just kind of gut, this is what I think?
Well, it's not just completely empty because he's reading these periodicals.
Right, but it's not the Wall Street Journal, is it?
No, he's not reading Edmund Burke.
I mean, he's not pondering whether Viscount Bollingbrook
was the real father of intellectual conservatism.
No, but he's not reading, I don't know,
strategic analysis from top geopoliticians or anything.
He's not Margaret Thatcher reading Hayek or Dostoevsky.
He's absolutely not that at all,
and nor is he ever reading anything that would possibly contradict him.
So he's reading things that confirm his,
I was going to say prejudices, that's the wrong word,
that confirm all his instincts. And that is kind of the key, isn't it?
That is the key.
But he doesn't need to kind of, I mean, so often politicians
whose opinions are kind of informed by detailed study
or academic study or whatever,
they have to kind of lower it down a grade
when they're kind of making their pitch,
and so it sounds condescending or bogus or false or hypocritical.
Whereas Reagan never had to do that
because he is simply articulating what he feels.
Absolutely.
And his radio frequency is the radio frequency

of so many of his listeners.
Brilliant way of putting it, Tom, actually.
I think it's exactly the right way of putting it.
I think there's nothing contrived about it.
He reads up all the stuff.
He has all the facts.
He has all the stories to back up what he believes.
As you say, it's what a lot of other people believe in the 1950s.
So the funny thing is this is Eisenhower's America.
So it's definitely not a kind of socialist state by any means.
But there is a sense,
left over, I think, from our sympathy to the New Deal,
that the government is regulating a lot,
that we're paying too much tax,
don't like communism,
don't like interference, all these kinds of things.
And Reagan is brilliant at articulating them.
As you say, he's not kind of Ed Miliband.
He hasn't been pouring over policy documents.
Or, indeed, Margaret Thatcher.
No, he's not Margaret Thatcher either.
What it is, he's absolutely, he has an extraordinary gift
to bring these things alive through human stories
and to create a sense of empathy with his audience.
And his affable, charming manner
means that even people who don't necessarily agree with him
still like him and enjoy the performance, actually.
I mean, not everybody, of course.
But all the time, he's becoming more right-wing.
So I think it's not static.
He's been radicalized.
He's talking to plant managers who say to him,
well, the government red tape stops us.
Because he visits 135 plants, I think,
in the first year or two, in 25 states,
200,000 employees he shakes hands with, extraordinary.
The weird thing is that there's actually quite a parallel there
with Gorbachev, who was kind of doing the same thing.
Yeah, Gorbachev goes around plants.
Yes, he does. But Reagan is doing it in such a systematic way.
I mean, it's extraordinary.
He's being exposed. There are so many people, actually,
by the time he runs for president,
who have, I mean, there are obviously a lot of people

who've seen him in films, but there are so many people
who would have met him at these, or who would know people
who would have met him at these general, general electric
employ a quarter of a million people.
And probably all of them have seen Reagan at some point.
So he's being driven rightwards.
General Electric get him this amazing house, actually,
in Pacific Hallisades in California, full of gizmos.
So he has the General Electric house.
So he has a swimming pool with underwater lights.
I'd say they have to install a massive generator
because it requires...
Otherwise, it would...
So it's actually a circuit the whole of Los Angeles.
It actually sounds quite annoying in some way.
So things like, all the curtains are opened by remote controls.
But I assume that there's some ginormous control room or keyboard.
He has three fridges and two ovens.
You very rarely need three fridges and two ovens.
Do you, I mean...
Maybe they do a lot of catering.
There is a definite tension, I think,
emerging with General Electric
because they don't want him to be too right-wing.
So by the end of the 1950s,
he definitely has become radicalized
because when JFK becomes president in 1960,
Reagan, he says,
well, Kennedy is just offering Marxism.
You know, Kennedy is a Marxist.
At that point, you sort of say, oh, that's not quite
your sort of standard middle-of-the-road Republican position.
There's another very funny index of it,
and I really don't need to tell you
because this is your mastermind subject.
But in 1952,
Reagan's view on Nixon,
who's running as Eisenhower's vice president,
is very negative and describes him as less than honest
and he is an ambitious opportunist,
completely undeserving of the high honor recorded him.
Yeah.
Not inaccurate.
And then in 1960, when Nixon is running against Kennedy,

oh, he wasn't the villain I thought him to be.

Yes.

Yeah, and of course, as time goes on, Reagan starts to think that Nixon is actually possibly a bit not right-wing enough.

Right.

A bit of a commie.

Yeah.

So he's definitely, he then is further enraged because I mentioned earlier that Reagan, when he was running the acting union, had broken this deal for MCA, his agency to get involved in TV production, which a lot of people thought was a very dodgy arrangement.

And the Kennedy administration, the Justice Department look into this and they're being run by Robert Kennedy. And Reagan develops this absolutely obsessive hatred of Robert Kennedy, who he blames for, you know, everything that's sort of going wrong for him.

Because about this point, General Electric Theater's ratings started to decline.

They're being beaten by Bonanza.

Yeah.

And this is absolutely normal.

I mean, this is what happens, you know, a show is, they've had a really good run, you know, eight years or so, and now they're going into decline.

Well, it's competition, isn't it?

It's capitalism.

It is.

It's what right-wing Republicans are all in favour of.

And General Electric think, well, Ron Reagan, he's getting a bit old.

He's very right-wing.

He's a bit of a liability.

Because he's also released a record.

Have you seen this in LB?

No.

Ronald Reagan speaks out against socialised medicine.

It's not a song.

It's not musical.
Imagine him's crooning to that.
Yeah.
Crooning about the dangers of socialised medicine.
There's a lot of points.
General Electric think, they say to him very politely,
you know, we will, the show is coming to an end.
We'd love to have you stay on as an ambassador.
So they're going to treat him properly.
He's offended by that.
He says, I'm not, you know, I'm still a book.
Because deep down, I think,
there's still a part of Reagan that wishes
he was Stern Hollywood.
I mean, his last film, The Killers.
I mean, that's early 1960s.
So there's still a bit of him that hankers for doing that.
And he plays a thug in that, doesn't he?
He does, yeah, very much against his better instincts.
See, this is the thing.
He doesn't like paying the thug
because he wants to always play himself.
He has to pretend to beat up Angie Dickinson,
who is reputedly one of Kennedy's caramores.
Really? Golly.
There's something great metaphor there.
Yeah, Deepwater's there.
So he ends up hosting a lesser show
sponsored by a company called US Borax,
called Death Valley Days.
Is this the one that's been procured for him by Moon,
his brother?
I think it might be.
Yes, because Moon becomes an advertising man, doesn't he?
With McCann Erickson, I think.
But it's at this point that politics calls.
So that speech that you did so brilliantly,
I have to say, Tom.
Thank you, Dominic.
In a different league from your Marilyn Monroe,
or indeed your Sopranos renditions
that you've done on previous episodes of The Rest is History.
Thank you.
In 1964, the Republicans nominate Barry Goldwater

for president.

Barry Goldwater is from Arizona.

And he's really a libertarian rather than a conservative.

I mean, Barry Goldwater is an absolutely fascinating man, because he appears to be very much a man of the hard right.

And yes, actually, he's in favor of gay rights.

He's in favor of drug liberalization.

He supports abortion.

He's actually a member of the NAACP, the Civil Rights Organization.

But he opposes civil rights legislation, because he doesn't like federal government overreach.

And also, the unfortunate thing for him is that it seems like he's in favor of nuclear war.

Which is...

Yes, at one point he says...

He makes a series of gaffes.

So he says he'd like to throw...

He'd like to lob one into the men's room at the Kremlin.

And he has the slogan, in your right, in your heart, you know he's right.

And the repost is in your guts, you know he's nuts.

Yeah.

I mean, you say he's unhiding to nothing the year after the Kennedy assassination running against Lyndon Johnson.

And a lot of moderate Republicans, not so much Nixon, but kind of what Rockefeller Republicans, Nelson Rockefeller, who's the bigwig from New York, he'd been there.

He was the sort of poster boy for liberal Republicans.

And they all absolutely...

You know, they thought Goldwater was a lunatic.

Reagan obviously doesn't, and nor crucially to a load of Californian businessmen.

So this guy called Holmes Tuttle.

Of course there is.

So he handles kind of forward car sales.

There's a load of others, Henry Salvatore, who's oil, Syruble is oil, Justin Dart is drugstores.

So these are Californian businessmen, entrepreneurs.

They are very suspicious of the kind of East Coast, very suspicious of Washington.

They want lower taxes, they want less regulation, all these kinds of things.

And it's Tuttle.

He books a slot, a fundraiser at the Ambassador Hotel in LA.

Very famous kind of cabaret nightclub room they have called Coconut Grove.

So the Ambassador Hotel is where Robert Kennedy ends up being shot in 1968.

But they book this slot and they get Reagan to come in and do the talk.

And of course, what you did, you're rendezvous with Destiny.

What precedes that is just Reagan's standard general electric talk, really.

Low taxes, communism is evil, Barry Goldwater is a decent man who's going to, you know, roll back the federal government, all of this stuff.

And he does it really superbly.

He does it so well.

Because he's been auditioning for it for a decade.

Exactly.

And he's got all the readers digest facts.

Yeah.

And he does it brilliantly and they say, golly, it's so good.

We will buy half an hour TV time for the Goldwater campaign as long as they put on Reagan.

And actually, some of the Goldwater people say, could we not actually put on Goldwater?

No, they say, no, no, no, it has to be Reagan.

And he does it on TV.

You can see it on YouTube.

It's a very, you know, it's pure undiluted kind of Goldwater Reaganism, but it's brilliantly delivered.

But if you have the sound turned down and you didn't know he's giving a talk, you could imagine it a kind of Frank Sinatra croon.

You could.

Yeah.

That's the vibe.

Yeah.

He commands the stage.

He has a sort of emollient, mellifluous manner.

Yeah.

He's very earnest.

He's very convincing.

I agree.

He could be, it could be a sort of Sinatra style performance.

And so basically, people watch that and think, actually, Reagan would be better than Goldwater.

They do.

And is this the moment where people start thinking he could be President?

He could perhaps, you know, before that be Governor of California.

Governor of California, certainly.

Absolutely they do.

They look at Reagan.

So another Hollywood actor, George Murphy, he's elected to the Senate from California.

So the idea of a Hollywood actor going into politics is not automatically ludicrous.

Plus, everything Reagan has done has been excellent training for a political campaign.

His general electric plant visits.

I mean, they're nothing if not campaign appearances.

Shaking hands, a few jokes, a little bit of a political chat and then off you go.

Goodbye.

I mean, it's the most brilliant preparation for the challenge of any form of gubernatorial or presidential or whatever.

Plus, it's not like he's just a front man because, you know, when he has deeply held prejudices.

Right.

He has very deeply held convictions when he sits around with Holmes Tuttle or whoever it might be.

Trueing the fat.

Yeah.

Trueing the fat.

He, he feels it just as strongly as they do and he knows all the stuff.

So he's a, he's a, it's an obvious choice.

So they come to him.

1965 or so.

And they say we've formed a group called the friends upon Reagan and we would like you to run for governor of California.

Okay.

Well, I think that's a perfect point to take a break.

When we come back, we will look at Reagan's governorship and then the right to the presidency.

Hello, welcome back to the rest is history.

Dominate end of part one.

You've got us to the friends of Ronald Reagan gearing up to have their man run for the governorship of California in 1966.

Is that right?

66.

Yeah.

66.

So the, the 60s are really starting to swing.

California is one of the global epicenters of that.

It's home of hippies and student protests and all that kind of thing.

Meanwhile, Reagan is going in a very opposite direction.

All the kind of the stuff that we associate with 1960s, California.

Is that very much a minority interest?

I think it will, every action provokes an equal and opposite reaction.

I suppose you would say Tom.

So you're absolutely right that there's that scene in San Francisco.

There are free speech protests at universities or filthy speech protests as Reagan calls them.

There's grain disquiet about the Vietnam war.

The 60s sort of pop culture has, is beginning to take that turn towards hippie, hippiness.

And I mean that, that sort of peaks in 1967 with the summer of love, you know, the, the parks in San Francisco, full of people with flowers in their hair and whatnot.

There's an enormous number of people in California, sort of suburban, middle-class, working-class people who don't buy into all that whatsoever.

I mean, these are, Reagan is brilliant at reaching them.

So there are, there are all these suburbs, particularly in Southern California, where there are people who have moved in from elsewhere.

So they moved in from the Midwest, like Reagan actually, or they've moved from Texas or Oklahoma.

So they bring with them quite conservative attitudes.

They've got, they've started churches there.

They, they meet at kind of coffee mornings and they, you know, there's this sort of nascent conservative movement in particularly Southern California.

Orange County is the place that people always point to, which is just outside Los Angeles.

So that's all kind of getting started.

But also California has been run by a guy called Pat Brown, Edmund G Brown, who is a, he's a kind of classic, you know, if a Hollywood casting agency had to supply a kind of Irish pole, he is the man.

And again and again through the story, this is something that comes up.

I mean, he's a casting agent. They look like they've been supplied by casting agency.

Yeah.

So, and Pat Brown absolutely looks like, I mean, he's a tremendous fellow in lots of ways.

Two-term governor, he's, he's basically one of the people who has made modern California.

He has spent loads of money.

I mean, arguably too much money as Reagan will discover.

So they've been, they're running a big deficit, but they've built schools and universities and all of these things.

They've really built the infrastructure of modern California, but it's been in for two terms.

There's a sense particularly among these sort of these quite, quite conservative middle-class suburban parts of the population that there's too much waste.

The tax is too high.

There's disquiet, of course, about racial unrest, because you've had things like Watts.

You've had the civil, it's not that the civil rights movement has sort of turned sour or anything,

but there have been a wave of urban riots that alarm kind of have turned white homeowners.

There's a sort of a dark turn, I suppose you would say.

So in the first episode, we talked about how Reagan's father had been very, very opposed to any interracial prejudice.

Yes.

And this was kind of late 20s, early 30s.

Has Reagan's attitude to this evolved?

No, I would say.

On a kind of right-wards way?

I mean, what's his attitude to the kind of the racial tensions in California at this time?

This is a very fraught subject and much sort of discussed by

photographers and historians.

Reagan himself doesn't seem to have had any personal prejudice at all.

There's a very famous incident when he's at Eureka College.

There are two black young men on the team.

They turn up to play somewhere and it turns out to be segregated.

And Reagan says, we're not actually that far from my home, from Dixon, I assume he's living in that point.

He says, I'll take these two guys home with me and we'll stay at my house.

And people have often sort of said, well, there you go.

Reagan's not racist at all.

I think what is probably fair to say is that Reagan is always, he dislikes the idea of the federal government intervening in kind of civil rights.

So he thinks it should be left to the states.

This is part of his sort of small governmentism, I think.

But it's also true to say that from the late 60s onwards, to get ahead in Republican politics as the Republican party becomes more Southernized and starts to rely very heavily on Southern white voters.

The dog whistle, as it were, is never far away.

And one thing that Reagan is already doing at this stage is he's telling parables about people who are clearly black.

So the most famous parable that he tells is the welfare queen.

He says, there's a woman in Chicago with 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 social security cards, collecting veterans benefits and four dead husbands.

She has a tax-free cash income of \$150,000.

And he never says it, but the understanding of all his listeners is that this person is black.

Now, this person, by the way, doesn't exist

or this doesn't exist to the degree that he describes.

And this parable seems to, to Reagan's critics,

this parable is a kind of dog whistle to say black people on welfare, taking your taxes, let's cut down on this.

Do you think also, I mean, a common thing about people from very poor backgrounds who become very successful, they often say, well, I've done it, so anyone can do it.

And in America, you know, the whole idea of the president coming from a log cabin, the American dream, all that kind of stuff, I mean, you said, you know,

Reagan has come from a culturally very white background.

And so he hasn't grown up with an awareness

of the way perhaps in which black Americans
have far more obstacles to overcome.
Yeah, I'm sure that's true.
I mean, is it the case that by the 60s,
he's looking around and saying, well, I've made it.
Why can't all these black people who are rioting?
Yeah.
Why aren't they getting out there
and pulling themselves up by their bootstraps?
I mean, is that his, his tape?
Undoubtedly.
If you said to him, I mean, there was a,
there are a couple of quotes.
I think there's something on the Nixon tapes
when he's talking about African countries
criticizing the United States.
And he uses the word monkeys to describe the,
the African kind of leaders or something.
But there aren't really, I mean, that there are,
there aren't, apart from that aside,
there are not loads of smoking guns to say,
Reagan deep down is a sort of, as a vicious racist.
But he's failing to check his white privilege
as the kids might put it now.
As the youth would say.
I think it's fair to say that he is instinctively hostile
to any form of federal intervention
on behalf of, not just African Americans,
but also the poor generally, I think.
And blind, a lot of people would say,
he's just blind to this issue.
And he is also his, he is willing
and his advisors are willing where necessary.
And we'll see it when he runs with the presidency in 1980
with a very famous campaign appearance that he made.
He is willing to, as it were,
show a bit of leg to people whose views on race
are definitely not progressive at all.
So he wins the Republican nomination
to run for the governorship.
And then he wins the governorship itself.
Yes.
And this, this is all going on while hippies
are putting flowers in the guns of the National Guard

and all that kind of stuff.

He does a pass an abortion bill, but he deeply regrets it.

Therapeutic abortion bill, right?

Which is actually at the time,

some of the most liberal abortion legislation in the nation.

California has some of the most liberal abortions.

But Reagan comes to regret it, doesn't he?

Well, Tom, this is the essence of Reagan as an operator.

What makes him so fascinating.

He says he regrets it later on,

but he still signs it.

Yeah, okay.

And Reagan, what makes him so interesting

as a political operator is the,

is the contrast between the very hard hitting rhetoric

and the sort of human events, readers digest view of the world

with the fact that in California, for example,

he turns out to be a very pragmatic kind of center right

governor and everybody who studied his period

as you know, from Lou Cannon,

who wrote the first really great books about Reagan onwards,

Ewan Morgan, all Reagan's biographers.

They all say about Reagan in California.

He was actually a pretty good governor.

So what legislation?

What does he do?

I mean, what are his signature?

He spends a lot of money on schools.

He agrees a deficit reduction plan

with the Democratic dominated legislature

that sees taxes go up in California

across the board by about a billion dollars.

So taxes up, not down.

He introduces controls on sort of car pollution.

He's very environmental, actually.

He blocks a dam, he blocks a highway.

He rides up, doesn't he, to a mountain ridge

that they want to blast away.

He goes on his horse, takes the press and he's on his horse

and he says, how would you want to destroy all this?

The highway must stop, all these kinds of things.

Because he's surrounded by,

this is where he learns how to govern.

Because when he arrives, he says,

I've never played a governor.
I don't know what to do.
And he has an advisor called Bill Clark
who works out how they're going to do it.
He works out a thing that's later much mocked
by Reagan's critics of what's called mini memos.
So basically, when you give Reagan a piece of paper,
it must be just a page.
And it's four paragraphs.
Paragraph one says, what's the problem?
Paragraph two is a bit of background.
Paragraph three, here are the options.
And paragraph four is, this is what we should do.
He says, this is how we will present information
to the governor.
He doesn't want too much.
He's not Margaret Thatcher,
who wants every possible piece of paper
and he's going to go through them all
until five o'clock in the morning.
Reagan just wants to make a decision straight away
or boil down.
And with smart people around him,
you know, pragmatic people,
he actually proves very good at kind of pulling the levers,
working with the legislature.
He wins reelection in 1970.
So actually, he is famous for,
I mean, the most famous thing he probably says
in his whole governorship is when he's mocking hippies.
And he says, the definition of a hippie is somebody who,
let's see, looks like Tarzan, walks like Jane
and smells like Cheetah.
Right. And of course, the hippie movement,
the counterculture, gives him the perfect opposition.
But I suppose what I would say about that is
Reagan is a hate figure for them
and he does criticize them and attack them
and all the rest of it.
But there is a kind of humor, a dry edge to it.
You know, he's actually,
Reagan is not actually a politician
who's very good at peddling hate, as it were.
You know, so he likes being inclusive

and being well-liked and being funny
and all those kinds of things,
which makes him such a good salesman, of course,
for conservative ideology.

Right. Okay.

And so this is the, going into the 70s,
this is the Nixon presidency, all that kind of stuff.

Nixon's won his second term.

So he will, you know, if he serves out his term,
that will be him done.

And so Reagan, by this point, must be thinking,
this is my chance.

Definitely.

But then Watergate happens
and that means that Nixon gets succeeded
by his vice president, George Ford,
on whom Reagan had commentated
as a sportscaster back in the days
when Ford had played college football
and Reagan had commentated on him.
Although he's later famous for falling off aeroplanes
and Chevy Chase would impersonate him falling over,
Ford was probably the greatest athlete
to have ever been president.

He's a very good golfer, wasn't he, his brother?

He's good at everything.

I mean, he was a really, really good footballer.

He could have been professional.

So this messes things up for Reagan?

Definitely it does.

Definitely.

But Ford is vulnerable.

So Ford definitely wants to run again in 1976.

But Reagan can challenge him.

There are all sorts of weaknesses.

They've just, you know, Vietnam falls in 1975.

The economy is in a pretty poor condition.

Post oil shock of 1973.

So there's a recession.

They're also getting a lot of flak for Daytona.

So Nixon and then Ford with Henry Kissinger
at their side have pursued a policy of Daytona
in the Soviet Union,

which hardcore anti-communists don't like at all.

Also, politics is obviously becoming increasingly about style,
about what people today call vibes.
And Ford does not have the correct vibes
for the new rights, for the conservative movement.
Because he's a sort of old fashioned Republican,
I mean, he still does smoke a pipe.
At his country club.
Yeah, at his country club.
He's very rust belt, Michigan.
So he doesn't have the same appeal
to the new emerging sun belt.
So that's the South and the Southwest.
These areas where massive population growth,
new conservatism, air conditioning,
so lots of new factories coming in, anti-union,
very religious.
Reagan can reach those people and Ford can't.
So Reagan decides he will challenge Ford.
And it's actually the one time,
Reagan is a serial winner,
but the only person who ever really beats him is Ford.
Because he loses those that run
for the Republican nomination.
He does.
He finds a couple of lines that work very well for him.
So one is a tax on Henry Kissinger
and this stuff about being number two in the world.
I mean, he'll bring that out again in 1980.
So he says we have been relegated to number two in the world.
We're America.
We can never be number two in the world.
So that's one thing.
The other thing is an issue that's now completely forgotten,
just the Panama Canal.
So yes, the United States,
that's very France in 1890 kind of stuff.
It is.
But the Panama Canal is a massive,
massive issue among kind of grassroots conservatives
in the 1970s.
So Ford and the later Jimmy Carter
are going to agree a deal to basically turn the Panama Canal
over to Panama,
because the Panamanians are pressing very vigorously for it.

And Reagan develops this line.
He develops it in the Florida primary in 1976
and then use it throughout the rest of the primary season.
We bought it.
We paid for it.
We built it.
And we're going to keep it.
And people love that.
You know, they're kind of people with blue hair,
a kind of ladies with blue hair,
whooping in the air.
But the institutional advantages for Ford,
as president, to great plus Reagan is a little,
he says silly things.
So there's a point at which he says he's going to cut
the federal budget by, what is it?
Like \$90 billion.
And so for example, retirees in Florida,
who depend on social security on the government backed
pensions, effectively.
They're horrified.
So he sort of, he frightens voters.
He hasn't found a way of sort of diluting or presenting
his readers' digesty kind of view of the world.
Well, he also, he almost chokes to death on a peanut.
That's true.
He kind of throws a peanut up in the air
and catches it like a, like a seal or something.
Yeah.
And almost chokes to death.
And I guess that Nancy's astrologer would say
that this was a portent because the person who actually
wins the 76 presidential election is a peanut farmer.
He's Jimmy Carter.
So Gerald Ford loses.
And so that presumably then the dream stays alive.
Even though Reagan is pretty old by this point.
Right.
Yeah.
Yeah.
So he would be the oldest president at this point.
Yes.
So 68, I think when he runs in 1980,
he dodges a peanut as it were in 1976.

So one of his biographers, Ewan Morgan,
British historian, very great scholar,
says of Reagan, had Reagan won the nomination in 1976,
it's hard to imagine him beating Carter.
Carter is the outsider.
There's a lot of revulsion about Watergate,
but also Carter is very strong in the South.
Yeah.
Carter's first Southerner for generations to win the White House.
Carter has a kind of, at that point,
has a kind of, you know, big smile.
Yes.
Positive vibes.
All that kind of stuff.
He hasn't yet been attacked by his killer rabbit
or Warren's cardigan or collapsed jogging
or any of those things.
A fascinating thing about Carter and Reagan
is that Carter, it's a bit like,
well, we've talked about this a few times in the rest of his history,
the underlying continuities of history beneath kind of partisan
politics and partisan struggles.
So Carter runs against Washington in 1976.
Carter describes himself as a citizen politician,
just an ordinary American, not a career politician, he says,
which is what Reagan had said in California.
Carter is in favor of lower taxes and deregulation,
and in fact starts the move towards deregulation,
which Reagan then inherits.
Carter is a Southerner and American politics is becoming Southerner,
he says, not just that the South is becoming more and more important,
but kind of Southern values of the kind of family, church, flag,
the army, the military, all these things.
They are becoming more and more popular among blue-collar voters generally.
Carter is obviously a Baptist, you know, an evangelical Christian,
the first person, the first overtly evangelical Christian
to win the presidency again in generations.
So there are lots of ways in which Carter actually sort of anticipates Reagan.
I don't think Reagan probably would have beaten Carter in 1976.
So Reagan has dodged the bullet as it were,
but then in the next four years, lots of things go wrong for Carter.
So the Iranian Revolution is the most obvious example of that.
There's an energy crisis.
I take quite a disobliging view of Carter as president.

I think he's not a very good president by any stretch of the imagination.
I think he gets lots of things, makes a lot of missteps.
I mean, the single worst thing he does is probably the air of negativity.
So he took, he's a very famous speech in the middle of 1979
about there's a profound malaise affecting the American people,
and it's all very gloomy.
And Carter is always telling people, you know,
don't waste electricity, turn off the lights.
I mean, we might say from the vantage point of 2023
that these are very sensible suggestions.
Meanwhile, Reagan with his 10 fridges.
Yeah, exactly.
Oh, let's get another mention.
Well, also Carter, Carter does things like,
Carter turns off the lights at the White House at Christmas
to save electricity.
Yeah.
He sort of swans around in his, he wants to be an ordinary person.
So he wears his cardigan and there's no grandeur,
there's no optimism about Carter.
And so what Reagan offers is cheery optimism and Hollywood glamour.
Yeah.
And so, yeah, I can see how that would be effective.
And all the trends as well are in Reagan's favour.
So I said about the sort of the growth of the sun belts
and southernization, but also,
Reagan has a new constituency at the end of the 80s
that he didn't really have before, which is the Christian right.
So the moral majority, people like that.
And it seems weird in some ways to people.
It anticipates the slight bewilderment with which some people
regard their adoption of Donald Trump.
People say, Reagan is this a Hollywood divorcee.
Yeah, because Carter would be a more obvious.
Of course.
Reagan goes around telling dirty jokes.
Yeah.
He has, what did he call his, the string of girls?
The cocospanials.
The cocospanials in his past.
But to be fair to Reagan.
I mean, he is as devout Christian as Jimmy Carter, I guess.
And he's very monogamous by nature, he seems, actually.
So there is material there for the Christian right to work with.

They love his anti-communism.

They love his fervent patriotism.

They are really driven into the Reagan's embrace because under Carter, the IRS, the Internal Revenue Service, announced that they're going to start taxing private schools that are what they're called segregation academies.

So there's been a huge explosion of private schools that have been formed to appeal to parents who are horrified by the desegregation of southern schools.

Right.

So rich racists.

Yeah, I suppose that's, I suppose that's, well, I mean, it's not just rich, actually.

Okay.

I mean, these schools becoming extremely, extremely popular in the South.

And the IRS says, if you don't show that you have a site, you know, that you're reflecting the sort of racial makeup of your state or whatever, then you will no longer be tax exempt. And this absolutely enrages a lot of the sort of churches that are behind these schools.

It means they fall out sort of terminally with Jimmy Carter.

And Reagan has a brilliant way of reaching them.

He goes to the religious round table in 1980, this big meeting of all the sort of evangelical bigwigs.

And he says to them, I know you can endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you and what you're doing. Masterly.

And everyone's like, hurrah, hurrah, what a tremendous fellow, all this.

So yeah, he wins the Republican, he's been hanging around in the seventies writing, he's been on the radio.

I mean, the Reagan is a master of the radio.

If you ever read, there's a book, I think it's called Reagan in His Own Hand or something like that, of all his radio scripts.

He would have been a brilliant columnist.

Well, he was a brilliant columnist.

He wrote columns.

He writes these five minute scripts.

They always start with a little story.

You know, the other day I was in the supermarket and there was a man in front of me, big strapping lad.

You know, he bought 72 bags of shopping and then I couldn't

help noticing that he paid for them with welfare stamps.
And I said to myself, what am I doing wrong,
that this guy is on welfare and my taxes.
Your tax dollars are going on.
Yeah.
Right.
Margaret Thatcher would not, even though she was actually quite good
at populism, she wasn't anything like as good as that.
So he has this way of sucking people in.
He wins the Republican nomination, he beats George.
George Bush is his big rival.
There's still a bit of a doubt whether he is his two right wing.
And that's Carter's big hope, actually,
because Carter's presidency has basically descended into
an utter abyss in 1980.
The hostages are still in Iran.
Killer rabbits are roaming this once in Florida.
Right.
It's garbage.
Well, the economy is in recession.
His new head of the Federal Reserve man called Paul Volcker.
He's a sort of monetarist.
His attitude is, well, we've got massive inflation,
so let's whack up interest rates.
So interest rates heading towards 20%.
The Soviet Union have invaded Afghanistan.
All the news is bad as far as Carter is concerned.
And the hostages is the worst of all.
Because it's a kind of protracted nightly on the news horror show.
And they were taken a year to the day before the 1980 presidential
election on the 4th of November, 1979.
There's 52 of them.
And Carter himself makes it a really big issue,
which is quite a foolish thing to do if you're not going to be able to get them out.
And he sends, well, he does this mission to try and rescue them.
The helicopters.
They crash in the desert.
It's an absolute disaster.
Shambles and a disaster.
Yeah, I remember a news magazine with the awful,
the twisted bodies on the desert and the wreckage of the helicopters.
And the general sense that not just Carter's presidency,
but America itself was on a massive downward slide.
Yes.

Which obviously is playing into everything that Reagan is offering.

Absolutely.

The thing about being number two in the world.

So the big doubt about Reagan is, is he too extreme?

Are people just going to stick with what they know with Carter and his cardigan at the last minute?

And Reagan launches his campaign after the convention.

I said we'd get to this because it is very controversial.

Bob Spitz doesn't mention it at all in his biography.

And I wonder, I don't really know why.

I think maybe it's too controversial or something.

Reagan launches his campaign after the convention at a place called the Neshoba County Fair in Mississippi in front of 15,000 people.

And this is very, very close to the site where three civil rights workers were murdered in 1964.

A very famous and tragic incident, James Cheney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner.

So they were killed by racists in 1964.

And Reagan goes to this place and he gives this speech in which he says,

I believe in states' rights.

Now, you may, some listeners may say, well, what's wrong with that?

States versus the federal government.

But in the context of the 60s and 70s, states' rights is often taken as short-hand for,

I don't believe in civil rights.

I stand with the white South.

So it's a dog whistle.

So people ever since have had massive, I mean, the massive arguments about whether or not it's a dog whistle.

I think it's undoubtedly an attempt to appeal to white, rural, Southern voters, many of whom will take that as saying, I stand with you and not the sort of black civil rights movement.

So for some people, so at the time, some people definitely see that as a gaffe.

And there were people, I mean, the test is, his pollster, Richard Worthlin, said to him, please don't do this.

You know, it's a big mistake.

But, you know, to succeed in politics, you have to have a bit of cynicism, I suppose.

And there are other people who are saying to Reagan, Carter is a Southerner, Carter could be strong in the South.

You have to go there and you have to do what you have to do to win those white Southern votes.

Because he ends up winning 60% of the white Southern votes.

A big factor in his eventual victory.

And this cast a shadow.

Yeah, so the shadow over him is that, I mean, that's quite a shadow.

And the other one is the worry that he is too aggressive.

But he dispels that quite nicely in the debate.

So that's the other thing that he needs to dispel.

That he's a warmonger and he does the debates very late.
It's just a week or so before the election.
I think it's the 28th of October against Carter.
Carter has triumphed in the debates against Gerald Ford in 1976.
Carter completely underestimates Reagan.
He thinks Reagan is a muppet, a fool, mad, really right wing.
And Carter is very self-confident.
Carter has got, you know, thousands and thousands of briefing books on all the issues.
He never would sully himself with the reader's digest.
I mean, Carter is such a control freak.
Carter, the story goes that Carter used to handle their bookings to the White House, a tennis court, personally.
You know, Carter is really a detail man.
So he thinks I'll wipe the floor with Reagan.
And actually he's very aggressive and Reagan is charming, affable.
I mean, Carter disses him.
Reagan just says, there you go again.
And then Reagan has this brilliantly crafted peroration.
Are you better off than you were four years ago?
We're as strong as we were four years ago.
And there's no way you can answer those questions and say yes, because the Carter presidency has been a bit of a disaster.
So the last, all those undecided voters of whom there were many, they break massively for Reagan.
And he wins in the Electoral College by 489 to 49.
Huge, you know, huge landslide against the sitting president.
What I always think is a fascinating little insight into Reagan's success is when he wins, so it's NBC, I think, that puts him over the top.
They declare that Reagan has won.
And the NBC announcer has got John Chancellor.
He says, and so Ronald Wilson, Reagan of California, a sports announcer, a film actor, a governor of California, is to be the next president or whatever.
For those three things, the sports announcer, the film actor, and then the California stuff.
I mean, they're central. A lot of people always said, how is it possible that this guy who commented on imaginary baseball games and then played the best friend in all these terrible films is president?
But actually, it's because he did those things.
Yeah, absolutely.
Yeah.
And then the general electric, I mean, the general electric was massive.
I mean, there isn't the key fact that America in 1980 is quite depressed about itself, about its prospects, about the way the world is going.

And Reagan, not just in his personality, but in his backstory, seems a living embodiment of the best of America.

Yeah, absolutely.

He is a kind of embodiment of the American dream and people are in a mood not to be cynical about that.

And so they vote for him.

Absolutely.

And so his presidency is born.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, will be the subject of our third and final episode on Ronald Reagan.

And if you simply can't wait, you know what you've got to do.

Yeah, Apple Podcasts.

You just go to Apple Podcasts and sign up.

Oh, RestisHistoryPod.com.

That was Ronald Reagan there advertising Restis History Club.

Because he also advertised Chesterfields, didn't he, despite not smoking?

He did.

If you could advertise Chesterfields in general electric, he could surely advertise the Restis History Tom, couldn't he?

You want to listen to this.

It's going to be great all about my presidency.

No commies.

They're all commies.

Listen to us.

Reassuring homely, homespun wisdom from Dominic Sandbrook, the Sage of Middle England.

Oh, God, keep this stuff coming.

I love it.

All right, we will see you next time.

Bye-bye.

God bless America.

Goodbye.