

# *REAGANLAND*

*AMERICA'S RIGHT TURN*  
1976-1980

**RICK PERLSTEIN**

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# REAGANLAND

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AMERICA'S RIGHT TURN  
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RICK PERLSTEIN

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**To JHC**

*I met a Californian who would  
Talk California—a state so blessed,  
He said, in climate none had ever died there  
A natural death.*

—ROBERT FROST

# **BOOK ONE**

**1976**

## CHAPTER 1

# “Nibbled to Death by Ducks”

RONALD REAGAN INSISTED THAT IT wasn't his fault.

In July of 1976, Jimmy Carter emerged from the Democratic National Convention ahead in the polls against President Gerald Ford by a record thirty-three percentage points. By November, Ford had staged a monumental comeback. But it was not monumental enough. Jimmy Carter was elected President of the United States with 50.08 percent of the popular vote, and 55 percent of the electoral college.

What had stopped Ford just shy of the prize? In newspaper columns, radio commentaries, and interviews all through the rest of 1976 and into 1977, Reagan blamed factors like the Democrat-controlled Congress, for allegedly holding back matching funds owed to Ford's campaign. And *All the President's Men*, the hit Watergate movie from spring, which Warner Bros. had rebooked into six hundred theaters two weeks before the election, for reminding voters of the incumbent's unpopular act of pardoning Richard Nixon after Watergate. And even the United Auto Workers, for calling a strike that autumn against the Ford Motor Company—sabotaging the economy to boost Jimmy Carter, Reagan claimed.

Ronald Reagan blamed everyone and everything, that is, except the factor many commentators said was *most* responsible for the ticket's defeat: Ronald Reagan.

He had challenged Ford for the nomination all the way through the convention, something unprecedented in the history of the Republican Party. Then, critics charged, he sat on his hands rather than seriously campaign for the ticket in the fall. If Ford had pulled in but 64,510 more votes in Texas and 7,232 more in Mississippi, he would have won the electoral college; or 137,984 more in Kentucky and West Virginia plus 35,473 from Missouri; or if he had won Ohio, where he came but 5,559 short, while adding either

Louisiana, Alabama, or Mississippi, which Ford lost by less than two points—all of these states where Reagan had droves of passionate fans. But according to one top Republican operative, “the only effective campaign work done by Reagan was for Carter, whose ads featured Reagan’s primary attacks against Ford.” “Former Gov. Ronald Reagan has succeeded in running out the election campaign without being drawn into full, direct support for President Ford,” the *New York Times* had concluded—in order, the cognoscenti whispered, to preserve his own chances for 1980 should Gerald Ford lose.

Reagan howled his defense: “No defeated candidate for the nomination has ever campaigned that hard for the nominee,” but there had been “a curtain of silence around my activities.” This was not true. They were covered widely—under headlines like “Reagan Shuns Role in Ford’s Campaign.”

Now they said his political career was over. The *Boston Globe’s* Washington columnist joked that Richard Nixon was a more likely presidential prospect in 1980. About Reagan, the *Times* said, “At 65, he is considered by some as too old to make another run for the presidency.” Even right-wingers agreed—scouring the horizon, one columnist noted, “for a bright, tough young conservative whom Reagan might groom for the GOP nomination in 1980.” The *Times* also said that “political professionals of both major parties” believed the GOP was “closer to extinction than ever before in its 122-year history”: they controlled only twelve governorships, and according to Ford’s pollster Robert Teeter, the loyalty of only 18 percent of Americans voters. Clearly, the *Newspaper of Record* concluded, “if the Republican Party is to rebuild it must entrust its future to younger men.”

And less conservative ones. John Rhodes, the House minority leader, was a disciple of conservative hero Barry Goldwater. His tiny caucus of 143 would face a wall of 292 Democrats when the 95th Congress convened in January. After the election, he rued that “we give the impression of not caring, the worst possible image a political party can have.” The American Conservative Union, chartered in 1964 to keep the faith after Goldwater’s presidential loss that year as the Republican nominee, felt so unwelcome in the party that they met in Chicago the weekend after the election to consider chartering a new one. Reagan himself entertained the idea, until one of his biggest donors threatened to cut him off if he persisted—though Reagan did suggest that perhaps a name change for the Grand Old Party was in order. “You know, in the business I used to be in, we discovered that very often the

title of a picture was very important as to whether people went to see it or not.” Even so, he had no suggestion what that should be.

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THE DEMOCRATS, ON THE OTHER hand, appeared to be in clover. After Watergate, America longed for redemption. They met Jimmy Carter, and fell in love.

One day that summer, the advertising man hired to make Gerald Ford’s TV commercials turned on the radio. Jimmy Carter’s mother, who’d joined the Peace Corps ten years earlier at the age of sixty-eight, whom an adoring nation called “Miz Lillian,” dialed in to a sports talk show to gab about her favorite professional wrestlers. “I was spellbound,” Malcolm MacDougall wrote. “One little phone call and 100,000 avid Boston sports fans had undoubtedly fallen in love with Jimmy Carter’s mother.”

He flipped on the TV. A Washington socialite was being interviewed by Johnny Carson. “She didn’t want to talk about her new book. She wanted to talk about her trip to Plains, Georgia. In the beginning she wasn’t a believer, she said. No, sir. She had been just as cynical as a lot of us liberals. But she’d talked with Jimmy Carter for hours. Just sat there on the porch, the two of them, talking about life and government and religion. And now she was a believer. Jimmy Carter was real, she said.... ‘He is going to save our country. He is going to make us all better people.’”

MacDougall traveled to Boston’s Logan Airport to fly to the Republican convention. At the newsstand, “Jimmy Carter’s face was staring at me from dozens of magazines.” And, from the covers of paperback books with titles like *The Miracle of Jimmy Carter*. He turned around: “a stack of T-shirts with peanuts on the front, and the words, ‘THE GRIN WILL WIN.’ This wasn’t a clothing store.”

Even so, 70 percent of the electorate told pollsters they had no intention of voting in November at all. One of them, a rabbi, wrote a *New York Times* op-ed. “I was one of the millions who rejected Barry Goldwater’s foreign policy, voted for Lyndon Baines Johnson, and then got Mr. Goldwater’s foreign policy anyway. I, too, voted for law and order and got Richard M. Nixon and Spiro T. Agnew. And now I think of the man who promised Congress that he would not interfere with the judicial process, and then pardoned Mr. Nixon as

almost his first official act.” So: no more voting. “If Pericles were alive today, he might be inclined to join me.”

The epidemic of political apathy spread particularly thick among the young. During the insurgent 1960s, the notion of universities as a seedbed of idealism was accepted as a political truism for all time. No longer. A university provost explained that he was seeing “a new breed of student who is thinking more about jobs, money, and the future”—just not *society’s* future. College business courses were oversubscribed. But politics? “Watergate taught them not to care,” a high school civics teacher rued. A college professor gave a speech to his daughter’s high school class, rhapsodizing about the excitement of the Kennedy years. “A few minutes into my talk I realized we weren’t even on the same planet.” He asked if they would protest if America began bombing Vietnam again. “Nothing. In desperation, I said: ‘For God’s sake, what *would* outrage you?’ After a pause, a girl in a cheerleading uniform raised her hand and said tentatively, ‘Well, I’d be pretty mad if they bombed this *school*.’”

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JIMMY CARTER KICKED OFF HIS general election campaign in Warm Springs, Georgia, on the front porch of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Winter White House.” Democrats traditionally opened on Labor Day in Detroit’s Cadillac Square. But Detroit was in the middle of a crime spree. Cadillac Square was only blocks from the Cobo Hall arena, where, the UPI reported, “gangs of black youth,” taking advantage of the fact the cash-strapped city had been forced to lay off nearly a thousand cops, had recently set upon a rock concert, robbing, beating, and raping attendees.

So: Warm Springs it was.

Two of Roosevelt’s sons were by Carter’s side. A seventy-three-year-old black man, subject of a famous *Life* magazine picture showing him playing accordion in his Navy uniform as Roosevelt’s funeral train trundled by, performed the New Deal anthem “Happy Days Are Here Again.” The Roosevelt connection marked Carter as an heir to the Democrats’ glorious liberal past. The Georgia setting invoked his Southern identity; if elected he would be the first president from the Deep South since Zachary Taylor in 1848. Featuring an African American spoke to his proud identity as a post-racist Southerner. Jimmy Carter would be the candidate for everyone. In his

speech, he feinted left, comparing Ford to Herbert Hoover—another “decent and well-intentioned man who sincerely believed that government could not or should not with bold action attack the terrible and economic and social ills of our nation.” He feinted right: “When there is a choice between government responsibility and private responsibility, we should always go with private responsibility.... When there is a choice between welfare and work, let’s go to work.” Then—and most importantly—he staked his claim as the candidate unconnected to the corrupt legacy of Richard Nixon:

“I owe the special interests nothing. I owe the people everything.”

Ford opened at the White House, signing a series of bills before the cameras. What bills? It didn’t matter. “We agreed,” Mal MacDougall later explained, “there were no issues strong enough to decide the election.” *Symbolism* mattered: a trustworthy man was now in charge.

“*Trust*,” Gerald Ford said, jabbing at his opponent at his first campaign rally a week later, in the basketball arena of his alma mater, the University of Michigan, “is not cleverly shading words so that each separate audience can hear what it wants to hear, but saying *plainly* and *simply* what you mean.”

He received an enthusiastic volley of applause.

“Not having to guess what a cand—”

A sound like a gunshot rang out. The president who had suffered two assassination attempts the previous September flinched—then, realizing that it was a firecracker, continued on as if nothing had happened. The applause swelled and swelled, until the entire crowd was up on its feet, as if in heartfelt gratitude at watching a political leader *not* being assassinated. The incident exemplified Ford’s campaign theme: he had returned the United States to normalcy.

Americans no longer had a political leader who was lying to their face. They were no longer losing a morally corroding war. Arab oil sheiks were no longer holding the economy hostage. And maybe, just maybe, the awful everyday traumas of the 1960s and 1970s might finally be *over*. “*I’m feeling good about America!*” Ford’s jingle bouncily intoned, in commercials that signposted his un-flashy ordinariness.

Jimmy Carter’s commercials sounded the same notes. They told the story of a man who had learned self-sufficiency and the value of hard work farming the same Georgia soil his family had since the eighteenth century, soil he sifted earnestly, wearing jeans and a plain flannel work shirt. His wife, Rosalynn, said, “Jimmy is honest, unselfish, and truly concerned about the

country. I think he'll be a great president." That presidential candidates were decent people had been "obvious until Watergate," a historian of campaign advertising observed. "Only in 1976 can a claim that a candidate is honest, unselfish, hard-working and concerned about the country warrant the conclusion that he will be a great president."

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THIS, HOWEVER, PRODUCED A PARADOX: the campaigns' eagerness to prove their man the most sincere produced quantum leaps in artifice.

Carter's packagers were ahead in this game. In 1972, Atlanta adman Gerald Rafshoon suggested that a future Carter presidential campaign could capitalize on Carter's "Kennedy smile"; Carter, impressed, hired him. In 1974, Carter researchers learned audiences responded best to key words and phrases like "not from Washington," "competence," and "integrity"; those became Rafshoon's palette. The peanut emerged early as a key symbol; it projected humility—an advantage, a strategist explained, since "humility was not our long suit." On the trail in 1976, Carter carried his own garment bag onto the campaign plane, and posed for "candid" wire service photos washing his socks in a hotel sink. Carter's eight-year-old daughter was put up front for the cameras; by that summer, with what felt like half the country's political journalists camped out in Plains, population 632, there was hardly a United States citizen who didn't know that Amy charged ten cents a glass at her lemonade stand. (The couple's three adult children, less photogenic, barely appeared.)

A former news producer named Barry Jagoda was Carter's media wizard. He boasted that because he came from that world, not advertising, he was better at manipulating TV news—"the most critical battlefield in media politics." For instance, on the day of the crucial Wisconsin primary, while the rest of the candidates remained behind for victory or concession speeches, Jagoda flew Carter to New York so that he could react to the returns live on a network news set. "This kind of media politics is seamless," he explained. "It doesn't mimic the news or play off the news. It is the news." (The interview in which Jagoda said this was another novel feature of the 1976 campaign: image-makers publicly *explaining* how they made artifice look real.)

Marketing sincerity was the particular specialty of the advisor Carter admired most. Twenty-eight-year-old Patrick Caddell had been a mere

seventeen when he first got into the business of political polling. He was an Irish-Catholic Massachusetts native whose family moved to Florida's Panhandle—Dixie, culturally speaking. In 1968, for a math project, the high school senior besotted with baseball statistics and the late President Kennedy went door to door in a working class Jacksonville neighborhood to poll residents about the upcoming presidential contest, and was struck by the insight that animated his career. He was shocked to hear, again and again: "Wallace or Kennedy, either one." Ideologically, that made little sense; during the Kennedy administration, the segregationist Governor George C. Wallace and the anti-segregationist Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy had been sworn enemies. When Caddell asked people to explain, they gave answers like "They're tough guys" and "You can believe them"; ideology seemed the last thing on their minds. While an undergraduate at Harvard University, Caddell opened a polling business out of his dorm room, and began devising innovative methods that built on this insight: tools for inquiring instead how the candidate made voters *feel*.

Americans' dominant feeling, he concluded, was *alienation*. He devised tools to measure it—"trust indices," "ladders of confidence"—and, from the results, language and symbols that his clients could deploy to convey to voters how they could *salve* that alienation. George McGovern hired Caddell as chief pollster for his presidential campaign in 1972 when Caddell was still at Harvard. McGovern lost soundly. But another Caddell client, twenty-nine-year-old Joseph Biden, won a senate seat after Caddell coached him not to criticize his incumbent opponent—that just made him another *politician*—but "Washington." That made him an "*anti-politician*"—the kind Caddell preferred: candidates who spoke to what he termed the electorate's "malaise," and what he began calling in 1974 America's "crisis of confidence."

Candidates, in other words, like Jimmy Carter. Caddell was instrumental in Carter's most important political breakthrough: trouncing George Wallace in the Florida Democratic primary. He first positioned Carter, Wallace-style, as alien to Washington; then Carter cemented the loyalty of Wallace fans by playing to Southerners' ancient longing to *really* stick it to the Yankees. George Wallace's longtime slogan was "Send them a message." Carter's was "This time, don't send them a message. Send them a president." "He is a generation ahead of most other technicians," a Ford campaign memo worried on the cusp of the general election. "No one has yet devised a system for protecting a GOP incumbent from the Caddell-style alienation attack."

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FORD ADMAN MALCOLM MACDOUGALL WAS called to the White House for his first briefing for the fall campaign by a man they identified to him only as “Mr. Cheney,” whose office, MacDougall observed, had a safe as big as a man “that had a big sign across it saying ‘LOCKED.’”

Pollster Robert Teeter described his recent innovation, a polling instrument that measured how warmly voters felt at the mention of a candidate’s name—a “feelings thermometer.” Ford’s temperature was forty-five: “Lukewarm.” Carter’s was twenty degrees higher. “We may fear that he’s another Nixon—a cold, calculating son of a bitch without a nonpolitical friend in the world. But this”—he pointed to the chart—“is reality. *This* is the Carter we have to deal with.”

Then he unveiled another innovation: the “perceptual map.” He laid down a transparent acetate sheet with scattered dots printed thereupon; with a dramatic flourish, he layered another on top, then another, then another. Each point represented a surveyed voter; each sheet, a different voter bloc. “Thousands of little dots began to cluster around Jimmy Carter. Blue-collar workers started clinging to the Carter circle. Intellectuals gathered around him. Catholics and Jews... Blacks and Chicanos smothered him with their dots. People who cared about busing dropped at his feet. People who were for gun control sided with him as well. Conservative women kissed his feet. Liberal women hugged his head. Environmentalists swarmed around him. The rich touched him. The poor clung to him.”

Their job, Teeter explained, was to wrench that geometry of pleasant associations from the opposing candidate to their own—by piling up proofs of their candidate’s trustworthiness, even as Carter’s side worked to turn Ford into the reanimated political corpse of Richard M. Nixon.

FBI director Clarence Kelley was revealed to have availed himself of \$335 worth of home improvements from the FBI’s carpentry shop, and Ford appeared to be doing nothing about it. Said Carter, “When people throughout the country, particularly young people, see Richard Nixon cheating, lying, and leaving the highest office in disgrace, when they see the previous attorney general violating the law and admitting it, when you see the head of the FBI break a little law and stay there, it gives everybody the sense that crime must be OK. ‘If the big shots in Washington can get away with it, well, so can I.’... The director of the FBI ought to be purer than Caesar’s wife.” Bob Dole, Ford’s hatchet-man running mate, gave the campaign’s response.

He asked how Carter could claim to be for closing tax loopholes and balancing the budget given his own “nice little savings” of \$41,702 on his 1975 taxes via a credit for equipment purchased for his peanut warehouse. Then Dole was confronted with questions about a \$5,000 campaign contribution he had taken from the lobbyist in charge of Gulf Oil’s illegal slush fund.

Peccadilloes were being elevated to blockbuster news status. After Watergate, journalists were frantic to expose corruption. Of a TV commercial intended to convey Carter’s untutored authenticity, the *New York Times* reported, “The body attached to the hand, which is never visible on the screen, belonged not to a newsman but to Gerald Rafshoon, the Atlanta advertising man who designs Mr. Carter’s ads.” On the president’s strategy of campaigning via Rose Garden photo opportunities, they described aides placing a fiberglass mat on the White House lawn before staging a “spontaneous” presidential stroll—then, “an hour later, the desk, chair, and mat had been moved and the television cameras repositioned so that Mr. and Mrs. Ford could be filmed striding into the garden from a different door”; the photograph was captioned, “President Ford shaking hands with his wife, Betty, in the Rose Garden... and doing it again for photographers who asked for a better angle.” This ceaseless questing after transparency seemed to freeze the electorate in a state of confusion, and by third week of September, one-third of voters told pollsters they had no idea which candidate they would choose, with 40 percent saying they would not vote at all.

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PUNDITS HOPED THE TRIVIALITY WOULD abate once and for all after September 23, when the first televised presidential debate since Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy locked horns in 1960 took place.

The first person ever to propose televised presidential debates was that most high-minded of presidential aspirants, Adlai Stevenson, disgusted by the development of electioneering via “the jingle, the spot announcement, and the animated cartoon,” and the prospect of yet one more year spent reciting the same canned speech in town after town in 1956. His advisors talked him out of the idea. He proposed it again for 1960 after his own political retirement: “Imagine discussion on the great issues of our time with the whole country watching.” It would “transform our circus-atmosphere

presidential campaigning into a great debate conducted in full view of all the people.”

Federal statute, however, stood in the way: Section 315 of the 1934 Federal Communications Act mandated that broadcasters grant “equal time” for *every* announced presidential candidate, even if there were dozens. Kennedy and Nixon got around this in 1960 by having Congress vote a temporary suspension of Section 315. Subsequent incumbents, disinclined to grant their challengers equal TV billing, had their congressional allies block that option. Then keen legal minds devised a loophole: if an *independent entity*, like the League of Women Voters, staged debates, then the networks could cover them as “news events.” So it was, for the first time in sixteen years, that the American public would at last be treated to a reprise of what Theodore White, in *The Making of the President 1960*, had called a “simultaneous gathering of all the tribes of America to ponder their choice between two chieftains in the largest political convocation in the history of man.” The presidential election could finally become a contest of ideas.

Then two men set themselves down behind podia in a venerable Philadelphia theater—a TV stage set, actually: the panel of questioners sat in front of a wall that blocked the audience’s view of the stage, and the audience was ordered not to make a sound. The producer boasted of creating a “completely controlled environment.” Outside, police penned off an equally controlled area for demonstrators. The most cacophonous protested abortion. Carter had had his first run-in with the issue shortly after the convention, in a meeting with Catholic bishops in New York. The candidate pandered to them by disavowing a plank in his party’s platform opposing a constitutional amendment overturning the *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, promising he would not stand in the way of such an amendment. But the bishops were not satisfied; they demanded he *advocate* for such an amendment. “No one told him,” the director of communications for the New York City archdiocese later remarked, “the bishops were talking of abortion as Auschwitz. Compromise was and is impossible for them.” The next month, Carter was banned from speaking in a Catholic church. In Scranton, Pennsylvania, Secret Service officers had to hustle him away from an anti-abortion mob. But the issue went undiscussed at the debate; both candidates’ positions were virtually identical: personally opposed; leave the question to the states.

Indeed, many of the most interesting issues went undiscussed. Questioning emphasized technical, bureaucratic concerns. The first exciting moments came when a producer broke a rule against showing reaction shots: Carter's face turned sour after Ford called him a hypocrite; Ford glowered when Carter accused him of public relations stunts. "Lousy television," the media guru Marshall McLuhan thought.

Until there arrived one of the most astonishing twenty-eight minutes in the history of TV.

Elizabeth Drew of the *New Yorker* asked the evening's final question, about Congress's eye-opening 1975 investigations of abuses by America's intelligence agencies, including assassinations of foreign leaders: "What do you think about trying to write in some new protections by getting new laws to govern these agencies?" The president, in his dullest Midwestern drone, insisted that his executive reorganizations and new wiretapping rules took care of the problem. "And I'm glad that we have a good director in George Bush, we *have* good executive orders, and the CIA, and the DIA, and NASA—I mean the NSA—are now doing a good job under proper supervision..."

He pursed his lips. He sounded nervous. This was a dodgy, almost Nixonian answer. Things were getting interesting. Carter had spoken frankly and harshly on the campaign trail about the abuses of intelligence agencies. Now, his Southern accent taking on intensity, he began lecturing: "One of the *very serious* things that has happened in our government in recent years, and has continued up until now, is a *breakdown* in the *trust* among our people in the—"

Silence. Even though his lips were moving.

A harsh electronic buzz.

The sonorous, authoritative voice of NBC anchorman David Brinkley: "The pool broadcasters in Philadelphia have lost the audio. It's not a conspiracy against Governor Carter or President Ford... they will fix it as soon as possible."

For hadn't American know-how always fixed everything? Hadn't it beat Hitler, delivered the world its first mass middle class, rebuilt Europe, put a man on the moon, fought a war on poverty? It had, once upon a time. O upon a time, the voices of such authoritative gray-haired white men reassured us, soothed us, guided us through the trauma of assassination and riot and Watergate and war, explained the inexplicable to us.

Not now.

The sound of a phone dialing. Carter gesticulating silently onscreen. David Brinkley breaking in, explaining nothing, again.

The scene shifted to backstage: “David, we don’t know what is happening, we’re as surprised as you are, uh, they were talking and suddenly they quit”; the backstage correspondent then tried convincing the 53.6 percent of American households that were tuning in that the debate had been “very lively.” He stuck microphones in the faces of campaign representatives, each dubiously claiming their men had scored knockout blows, that everything was going just smashingly (“... but I think the real winner tonight was the American people...”). An interviewer pronounced with a hint of triumph in his voice, “And now back to David Brinkley!”

Who, not realizing he was on the air, said nothing, then cast a glance offstage, mumbling, “I gather the debate is over, is that right?”

Then to the camera, conclusively: “So the debate is over! That’s it.”

But neither man moved. So the cameras kept filming... nothing.

It took the length of a TV situation comedy before the gremlin was finally fixed. It was announced that Jimmy Carter would continue answering where he left off. He said, “There has been too much government secrecy and not enough respect for the privacy of American citizens,” then grinned. The two men made closing statements. The ordeal ended. Eugene McCarthy, the former senator from Minnesota who was running a quixotic third-party bid but whose lawsuit to be included in the debate had failed, was asked what he thought about the interruption. He deadpanned, “I never noticed.” F. Clifton White, the political organizer most responsible for Barry Goldwater’s presidential nomination in 1964 and who was working unenthusiastically for Ford, was amazed at the sight of these “two men who were seeking to hold the most powerful office in the world... speechless at their podiums like waxworks dummies, afraid to open their mouths and take charge,” and observed that if one or the other had done so, they would have won the election right then and there.

But the candidates had been trained by their handlers—trained within an inch of their lives—that one could only *lose* a televised debate, so they should not try anything, anything at all, that risked a mistake, drilled not to sit down, or make any motion that might suggest weakness; indeed, it had required the intervention of a kindly stage manager just for the two men to wipe their sweaty brows during the interruption, because they would only do so when the cameras turned away. Some contest of ideas.

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THE CONSERVATIVE WEEKLY *HUMAN EVENTS* began running ads: “CONSERVATIVES You still have a choice, you can WRITE IN REAGAN.” Reagan got letters from adoring fans asking him why they shouldn’t. He always responded by pointing to the party platform—“written by people who support me... based on the positions I took during the campaign.... If Republican victory does occur based on our platform (and it is our conservative platform) then we can continue to build from there.” He also said that if Ford should lose, it would be time to “reassess our party and lay plans to bring together the new majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents who are looking for a banner around which to rally.”

The name he wished to see on that banner was clearly his own. Ronald Reagan had succeeded in turning his fight against a sitting president at the Republican convention into a nail-biter—then, on the last night, delivered an apparently impromptu speech that received more acclaim than the nominee’s, leaving many delegates in rapturous tears. Four days later he returned to the job he’d done after retiring from the California governor’s office: a five-minute daily political broadcast syndicated on hundreds of radio stations. One of the commentaries he recorded that day blamed “machine politics” in states where he had lost primaries to Ford—suggesting Ford was a corrupt political boss. He was asked in a press conference on the sidewalk outside the studio where he recorded his broadcasts, on the corner of Hollywood and Vine, about the buzz to form a conservative third party. He answered, “The Republican Party, down to less than 20 percent of the voting public, has got to reassess”—hardly a ringing endorsement of Gerald Ford.

Ford phoned Reagan, asking him angrily if he even cared about beating Jimmy Carter. The *New York Times* said the Reagans declined an invitation to spend the night at the White House. Ford’s running mate was asked if Reagan was snubbing them. “I don’t see any problem with Governor Reagan,” Bob Dole replied—but then Reagan’s longtime press secretary Lyn Nofziger, who was working that fall for Dole’s campaign, told the press, “It’s hard for a lot of us to generate any enthusiasm.”

What Reagan’s fans *were* enthusiastic about, at party meetings convened to plot the general election attack, was punishing Ford loyalists from the primaries. The chairman of the California Republicans was a former Reagan protégé named Paul Haerle who had jumped ship. Conservatives wore “Hang Haerle” buttons, complete with nooses, to the state convention. Texas’s