

This Day in History... July 6, 1921

Birth of Nancy Reagan

Nancy Reagan was born Anne Frances Robbins on July 6, 1921, in New York City, to actress Edith Prescott Lockett and car salesman Kenneth Seymour Robbins. From birth she was almost always called Nancy. After her parents legally divorced in 1928, Nancy was raised by her maternal aunt and uncle while Edith traveled in search of acting jobs to support herself and her daughter. In 1929, Nancy's mother married Dr. Loyal Edward Davis, an esteemed neurosurgeon. Davis adopted Edith's daughter in 1935 and her name was legally changed to Nancy Davis. Nancy attended Smith College in Massachusetts and graduated with a degree in English and drama in 1943.

Nancy Davis first met Ronald Reagan on November 15, 1949. Nancy was an actress at the time and had noticed her name on the Hollywood blacklist of suspected Communists. Ronald was the president of the Screen Actors Guild, so Nancy sought him out for help. Keeping her status as a guild actress in Hollywood and removing her name from the blacklist were essential to Nancy's career. It turned out Nancy had the same name as another actress during that time and the whole situation had been a misunderstanding. Ronald and Nancy began dating shortly after meeting.

Ronald was hesitant to marry Nancy at first due to his painful divorce from his first wife, Jane Wyman. After three years of dating, Ronald finally proposed to Nancy. The couple were married in a simple ceremony on March 4, 1952. Nancy and Ronald had two children together, Patricia Ann Reagan and Ronald Prescott Reagan. Nancy also became the stepmother of Ronald's daughter and adopted son from his first marriage.

In January 1981, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as the 40th president of the United States. Early on in Reagan's presidency, Nancy decided she wanted to renovate the White House. The building was in great need of repairs after years of oversight by previous administrations. Nancy is famous for saying "The White House belongs to all Americans. It's supposed to be something we're proud of." Instead of using government funding to do the renovations, Nancy relied on private donations. With the money collected, the entire second and third floors were renovated, as well as several rooms near the Oval Office. Other improvements included repainting walls, refinishing floors, repairing fireplaces, and replacing aging pipes, windows, and wires. During her time as first lady, Nancy was also famous for her wardrobe and sense of style. She was given clothing and jewelry by noted fashion designers and was compared to Jackie Kennedy on more than one occasion. Unfortunately, these gifts also earned her some criticism by the American people.

On March 30, 1981, Ronald Reagan was shot in an assassination attempt. The president survived the attack and was able to make a full recovery, but the whole event had a strong effect on Nancy. She became very involved in creating and monitoring her husband's schedule. She oversaw the organization and planning of many state dinners and even accompanied her husband to meetings with foreign dignitaries. Some people referred to Nancy as the president's "chief protector." Nancy famously admitted to consulting with an astrologist for some of these events. She hoped to determine what days were lucky or unlucky for her husband and planned accordingly. Nancy responded to skeptics by saying, "I was doing everything I could think of to protect my husband and keep him alive... Why take chances? It may be nonsense, but does anybody really know?" Although sometimes criticized for her actions, Nancy was an active supporter and advisor to her husband during his time as president. When the Reagans left the White House in 1989, 56 percent of Americans reported having a good opinion of Nancy.

Nancy continued traveling and speaking out against drug abuse after leaving the White House. She created the Nancy Reagan Foundation in 1989 to continue educating the public on the principles of the "Just Say No" campaign. In 2002, Nancy and Ronald were the third president and first lady in history to be jointly awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. Due to Ronald's failing health, Nancy accepted the medal for both of them. Later that year, Nancy was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush. This is the highest civilian award in the United States.

Nancy remained an active voice in the political world for the rest of her life. She attended speeches by many politicians and spent much of her time at the Regan Presidential Library. Upon her death in March 2016, Nancy became the second-longest-lived first lady of the United States, behind Bess Truman.



Stamp issued on Reagan's 101st birthday.



Imperforate Reagan Stamp



Nancy launched the "Just Say No" campaign.



Upon Ronald's death in 2004, the couple had been married for 52 years.



Nancy led a major renovation of the White House during her time there.

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