

## The Nice Thing About the Past

Washington

**R**ONALD REAGAN'S SPEECH to the Young Americans For Freedom turned out to be an inspirational rather than a political event.

The California Governor spoke feelingly of the Continental Congress, the founding fathers, and an American naval commander of long ago who defied the Austro-Hungarian empire. The closest he came to current events was a mention of the Vietnam war, the lesson of which, he said, was that if we are going to fight, we should "seek victory as quickly as possible."



The only trouble with America is caused by bureaucrats, critics of big business and "a widespread disaffection with things military."

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**A** REPUBLICAN POLITICIAN who makes a speech without mentioning Richard Nixon may not seriously wish to succeed him. Reagan, who supposedly came to town to capture the conservative wing of the party, seemed more anxious to compete with Gordon Sinclair, the Canadian journalist whose record about America, the kindly and unappreciated, is selling in the millions.

Reagan's silence on the big question may have been because he knew the young Tories had been agonizing over it all day in panel discussions and thought they deserved respite and escape. Or, he may have decided it was a no-win situation for him.

The conservatives, Nixon's last allies, are torn. They hate to make common cause with their old enemies, the A.C.L.U. and the A.D.A., who lead the "few extreme partisans" who are out to get the President. On the other hand, like other non-ideological Americans, they are deeply embarrassed by what is going on in the White House.

It is hard for a man to know what to say on the subject to a group which numbers people who think the chief executive should be impeached for his visit to China and detente with Russia.

Everybody seemed to have put all unhappy thoughts aside. One speaker even had managed to forget Spiro Agnew, an erstwhile Y.A.F. idol. He said proudly that "no conservative politician stumbled over his ethics."

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**A**BOUT ALL REAGAN accomplished was to signal the White House that he will not be joining the Richard Nixon Defense League, which is being led by Vice President Ford, Barry Goldwater and Senator Hugh Scott, who keeps insisting someone in the White House told him the President is innocent.

Poor Ford, a willing accomplice in his own destruction, has succeeded only in reviving questions about his intellectual capacities. Goldwater's turnabout advocacy is not proving conclusive even with the YAFers, whose favorite politician he is.

So Reagan is saying, perhaps sensibly, "leave me out of it." In 1974, it's better to talk about 1776. Maybe you don't win many friends that way, but you don't lose any, either.