

## Program Summary (17 November 2011)

At 8:10 p.m., President Alexander introduced the evening's speaker **Dr. Allen Matusow**. Professor Matusow holds the William Gaines Twyman Professorship and is in the Baker Institute at Rice University. He is former Dean of Humanities. Professor Matusow is the author of several scholarly books, including *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* published in 2009 by the University of Georgia Press.

Professor Matusow began by noting that 2011 is the 100th anniversary of the birth of the subject of tonight's talk, President Ronald Reagan. The title of tonight's talk is "Did Reagan Win the Cold War?"



With the recent release of tapes and documents by the Reagan library, historians have confirmed that Reagan was often quite engaged in decisions. So the interest has shifted from *Who made the decision?* to *How good were Reagan's decisions?*

The response to the Cold War took on three different flavors after WWII. Truman favored containment; Kissinger favored engagement (detente); while Reagan espoused victory. As such, he initiated a program to double the military budget, to push advanced weapon systems, including SDI. SDI was much ahead of its time, but Reagan viewed any technical limitations were trumped by political considerations that reassured a worried public. Reagan assumed a hero's role. Matusow recalls that as a young lifeguard, Reagan reportedly saved seventy-six individuals in the river he guarded.

Matusow shifts to the role Gorbachev played in the transformation of the USSR. Gorbachev was an early star, becoming the youngest member of the Politburo in 1980, before becoming General Secretary. Reagan and Gorbachev met five times to discuss weapons reductions, which led to the November 9, 1989 treaty (a date favored by Nancy Reagan's astrologer).

Matusow recounts the confused story and miscommunication that resulted in the opening of the Berlin Wall. That the 300,000 troops in East Germany did nothing is all the more remarkable.

In the end, Matusow gives the nod more to Gorbachev's actions (and incompetencies) than to Reagan's policies. But Matusow concluded with the observation that Reagan deserved at least a best supporting actor recognition for his role.

After a short question-and-answer period, the program concluded at 9:15 p.m.

David W. Scott  
Recording Secretary