

By Chuck Moss
special writer

"Reagan's America: Innocents At Home,"
by Garry Wills, Doubleday, 388 pages, \$19.95.

Is the glass half empty or half full? Thus went the old commercial, and the question lurks behind the facade of the 1980s. Political columnist Garry Wills now tries an answer with "Reagan's America," subtitled "Innocents at Home," a well-underpinned but overwrought analysis of the Reagan phenomenon.

Garry Wills is a political thinker who combines historical scholarship with current commentary. His previous books ("Nixon Agonistes," "Inventing America") deal with the presidency. Now he tries to get a handle on Ronald Reagan.

Basically, Wills sees Reagan as a fraud. Delving into Reagan's background, Wills finds his father to be a slippery salesman, his family to be beneficiaries of the despised New Deal.

Ronald Reagan's selective memory is well-known and today, well-investigated. Wills uncovers with documented detail, the gaps and inconsistencies in Reagan's sunny self-invented history.

But Wills sees more. Reagan is not a simple fraud, he actually believes in his false-front America. In this he is joined by the country at large, which also wishes to believe in Reagan's America — a place of white picket fences and no limits.

What Wills calls the "geriatric juvenile lead" has successfully fooled America into believing itself sinless. Reagan's triumph is thus a mass self-fraud, born of fear and uncertainty.

Well okay. During the Euro-missile controversy, Wills wrote a column that went like this: "All those protesters in the streets must mean that the people of Europe don't want our missiles, and since the missiles are being deployed, obviously Western Europe is at least as enslaved as the Soviet East."

That's the sort of hysterical glitch in logic that has made Wills' history suspect. In "Innocents" Wills is hostile to the traditional vision Reagan offers. America, Wills says, is not sunny. Greenfield Village is not the past. The gap between myth and reality is there, and to call upon the mythic American past is to deny bad things in the present: racism, inequality, etc.

Okay, fair enough. But Wills goes farther. He finds Reagan's eternally sunny disposition frightening. He finds it inexplicable and ominous that America accepts this self-fraud. Finally, he frets over the future, perplexed and anguished.

This isn't a bad book. There's a lot of interesting Reagania in the detailed backgrounds. Wills comes up with some insightful comments, his premise is taut and sound. But as with the Euro-missiles, Wills boings off into the ozone, heading from firm logical ground into ether. Wills views Reagan and finds evil, but he's just as apt to find the heart of darkness in a hot dog ad.

Like so many intellectuals, Wills simply misses the bus. There is sin in America past and present, granted. But the '70s showed self-hatred to be a sterile, and in the end, dangerous, dead end. Is it really so baffling that people respond to a leader who, in a dark and confusing time, found strength in his people's mythic past and conveyed that strength to the nation?

review

Sure, the history of America isn't perfect. But do you wonder at the success of a president who habitually, relentlessly, remorselessly, sees the glass not half-empty but half-full?

Looking for artists

The Detroit Institute of Arts will sponsor an exhibition of art work by former Detroit School students April 5 to May 3.

To assure strong participation, the museum has initiated a search for persons who were students in the Detroit Public School system anytime from 1936 to 1966 and who have been active in the visual arts — painting, sculpture, photography,

prints, textiles, ceramics and related media.

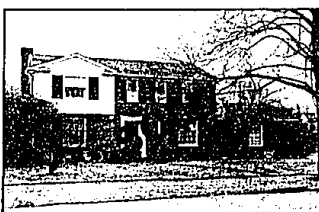
The alumni are asked to submit three slides of their work along with a resume containing education and work history. All slide entries are due by Monday, March 2.

For information, call 833-7888. Send slides to Charles H. Lewis, Education Dept., Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit 48202.



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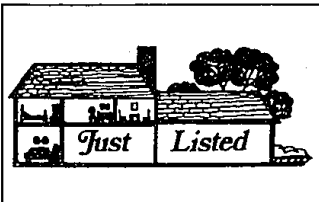
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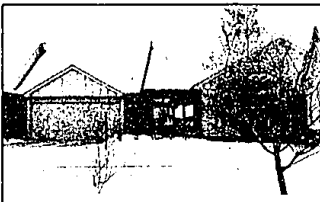
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Mall show

All kinds of art by members of the Creative Council will be on exhibit at Somerset Mall of Troy Sunday, Feb. 22 through Saturday, Feb. 28. The sampling at left includes a weaving by Ruth Parks, painting by award winner Donna Beaubien, sculpture by Ann Bull and pottery by Millicent Misch. Creative Council is a non-profit organization of Michigan women who are artists and artisans. The group helps build skills as well as outlets, plus providing opportunities for sharing ideas.

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JMC Communities cordially invites you to a complimentary reception:
Thursday, Feb. 26 7:30 PM
Novi Hilton, I-275 and 8 Mile Road, Novi, Michigan
Friday, Feb. 27 7:30 PM
Somerset Inn, 2601 West Big Beaver, Troy, Michigan

Join us for free refreshments and learn about golf course living at Pinebrook and Island living by the sea at HarbourSide. You'll meet representatives of both communities who will answer your questions about the best Florida has to offer ... with no obligation, of course. So RSVP today and just to whet your appetite, here are some facts about our communities.

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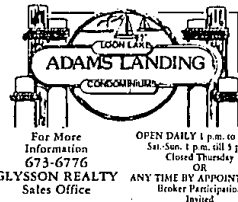
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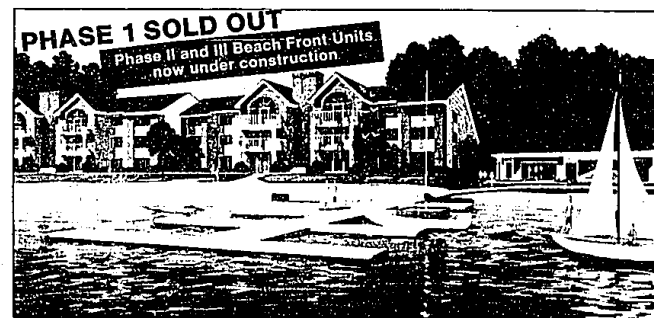
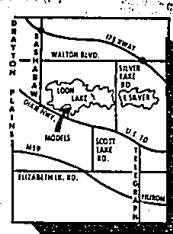


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Club House - Pool area in Spring of '87. Artists conception only - not exactly as pictured.

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