

When a famous person dies, he or she is often remembered through an address, or eulogy, given by a close friend or family member. When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Robert F. Kennedy gave a eulogy for him at his funeral, calling for the country to honor King's work by promoting peace in the nation. Brooke Shields, famous model and actress, spoke at Michael Jackson's funeral, where she painted a portrait of a loving friend, both funny and fragile—much different from popular views of Jackson. Such tributes are ways for the living to both honor and remember the dead. Following are three eulogies for three famous people given by equally famous individuals: actor Kevin Costner's eulogy for singer and actress Whitney Houston, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's eulogy for President Ronald Reagan, and media mogul Oprah Winfrey's eulogy for civil rights activist, Rosa Parks.

EULOGIES FOR WHITNEY HOUSTON, RONALD REAGAN, AND ROSA PARKS

BY KEVIN COSTNER, MARGARET THATCHER, AND OPRAH WINFREY

EULOGY FOR WHITNEY HOUSTON BY KEVIN COSTNER

I'm going to say some stories. Maybe some of them you know, maybe some of them you don't. I wrote 'em down because I didn't want to miss anything.

The song "I Will Always Love You" almost wasn't. It wasn't supposed to be in the movie. The first choice was going to be "What Becomes of a Broken Heart." But it had been out the year before and in another movie, and we felt that it wouldn't have the impact and so we couldn't use it.

So what becomes of our broken hearts?

Whitney returns home today, to the place where it all began, and I urge us all, inside and outside, across the nation and around the world, to dry our tears, suspend our sorrow, and perhaps our anger, just long enough, just long enough to remember the sweet miracle of Whitney.

Never forgetting that Cissy and Bobbi Kristina sit among us. Your mother and I had a lot in common.

I know many at this moment are thinking, "Really?" [Laughter from the audience.] "She's a girl, you're a boy. You're white, she's black. We heard you like to sing. But our sister could really sing. So what am I talking about? Kevin Costner and Whitney Houston, they don't have anything in common at all." Well, you'd be wrong about that.

We both grew up in the Baptist church. It wasn't as big as this. My grandmother played the piano, and she led the choir and her two daughters, my mom and my aunt, both sang in it. . . .

I can see her in my own mind running around here as a skinny little girl, knowing everyone, everyone's business, knowing every inch of this place. I can also see her in trouble, too, trying to use that beautiful smile, trying to talk her way out of it, and Cissy not having any of it. . . .

At the height of her fame as a singer, I asked her to be my co-star in a movie called "The Bodyguard." I thought she was the perfect choice, but the red flags came out immediately. Maybe I should think this over a bit! [Laughs.]

I was reminded that this would be her first acting role. We could also think about another singer, was a suggestion. Maybe somebody white. Nobody ever said it out loud, but it was a fair question. It was. There would be a lot riding on this. Maybe a more experienced actress was the way to go. It was clear I really had to think about this.

I told everyone that I had taken notice that Whitney was black. The only problem was I thought she was perfect for what we were trying to do. . . .

The Whitney I knew, despite her success and worldwide fame, still wondered: Am I good enough? Am I pretty enough? Will they like me?

It was the burden that made her great and the part that made her stumble in the end.

Whitney, if you could hear me now I would tell you, you weren't just good enough—you were great. You sang the whole damn song without a band. You made the picture what it was.

A lot of leading men could have played my part, a lot of guys could have filled that role, but you, Whitney, I truly believe that you were the only one who could have played Rachel Marin at that time. [Applause.]

You weren't just pretty—you were as beautiful as a woman could be. And people didn't just like you, Whitney—they loved you.

I was your pretend bodyguard once not so long ago, and now you're gone, too soon, leaving us with memories of a little girl who stepped bravely in front of this church, in front of the ones that loved you first, in front of the ones that loved you best and loved you the longest.

Then, boldly, you stepped into the white-hot light of the world stage, and what you did is the rarest of achievements. You set the bar so high that professional singers, your own colleagues, they don't want to sing that little country song—what would be the point?

Now the only ones who sing your songs are young girls like you who are dreaming of being you some day.

And so to you, Bobbi Kristina, and to all those young girls who are dreaming that dream and maybe thinking they aren't good enough, I think Whitney would tell you: Guard your bodies, and guard the precious miracle of your own life, and then sing your hearts out—knowing that there's a lady in heaven who is making God Himself wonder how he created something so perfect.

So off you go, Whitney, off you go . . . escorted by an army of angels to your Heavenly Father. And when you sing before Him, don't you worry—you'll be good enough.

EULOGY FOR RONALD REAGAN BY MARGARET THATCHER

National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., June 11, 2004

We have lost a great president, a great American, and a great man, and I have lost a dear friend.

In his lifetime, Ronald Reagan was such a cheerful and invigorating presence that it was easy to forget what daunting historic tasks he set himself. He sought to mend America's wounded spirit, to restore the strength of the free world, and to free the slaves of communism. These were causes hard to accomplish and heavy with risk, yet they were pursued with almost a lightness of spirit, for Ronald Reagan also embodied another great cause—what Arnold Bennett once called "the great cause of cheering us all up." His policies had a

freshness and optimism that won converts from every class and every nation, and ultimately, from the very heart of the "evil empire."

Yet his humour often had a purpose beyond humour. In the terrible hours after the attempt on his life, his easy jokes gave reassurance to an anxious world. They were evidence that in the aftermath of terror and in the midst of hysteria one great heart at least remained sane and jocular. They were truly grace under pressure. And perhaps they signified grace of a deeper kind. Ronnie himself certainly believed that he had been given back his life for a purpose. As he told a priest after his recovery "Whatever time I've got left now belongs to the big fella upstairs."

And surely, it is hard to deny that Ronald Reagan's life was providential when we look at what he achieved in the eight years that followed.

Others prophesied the decline of the West. He inspired America and its allies with renewed faith in their mission of freedom.

Others saw only limits to growth. He transformed a stagnant economy into an engine of opportunity.

Others hoped, at best, for an uneasy cohabitation with the Soviet Union. He won the Cold War, not only without firing a shot, but also by inviting enemies out of their fortress and turning them into friends.

I cannot imagine how any diplomat or any dramatist could improve on his words to Mikhail Gorbachev at the Geneva summit. "Let me tell you why it is we distrust you." Those words are candid and tough and they cannot have been easy to hear. But they are also a clear invitation to a new beginning and a new relationship that would be rooted in trust.

We live today in the world that Ronald Reagan began to reshape with those words. It is a very different world, with different challenges and new dangers. All in all, however, it is one of greater freedom and prosperity, one more hopeful than the world he inherited on becoming president.

As Prime Minister, I worked closely with Ronald Reagan for eight of the most important years of all our lives. We talked regularly, both before and after his presidency, and I have had time and cause to reflect on what made him a great president.

Ronald Reagan knew his own mind. He had firm principles and, I believe, right ones. He expounded them clearly. He acted upon them decisively.

When the world threw problems at the White House, he was not baffled or disorientated or overwhelmed.

He knew almost instinctively what to do.

When his aides were preparing option papers for his decision, they were able to cut out entire rafts of proposals that they knew "the old man" would never wear. When his allies came under Soviet or domestic pressure, they could look confidently to Washington for firm leadership, and when his enemies tested American resolve, they soon discovered that his resolve was firm and unyielding.

Yet his ideas, so clear, were never simplistic. He saw the many sides of truth. Yes, he warned that the Soviet Union had an insatiable drive for military power and territorial expansion, but he also sensed that it was being eaten away by systemic failures impossible to reform. Yes, he did not shrink from denouncing Moscow's "evil empire." But he realised that a man of good will might nonetheless emerge from within its dark corridors.

So the President resisted Soviet expansion and pressed down on Soviet weakness at every point until the day came when communism began to collapse beneath the combined weight of these pressures and its own failures. And when a man of good will did emerge from the ruins, President Reagan stepped forward to shake his hand and to offer sincere cooperation.

Nothing was more typical of Ronald Reagan than that large-hearted magnanimity, and nothing was more American.

Therein lies perhaps the final explanation of his achievements. Ronald Reagan carried the American people with him in his great endeavours because there was perfect sympathy between them. He and they loved America and what it stands for: freedom and opportunity for ordinary people.

As an actor in Hollywood's golden age, he helped to make the American dream live for millions all over the globe. His own life was a fulfilment of that dream. He never succumbed to the embarrassment some people feel about an honest expression of love of country. He was able to say "God bless America" with equal fervour in public and in private. And so he was able to call confidently

upon his fellow countrymen to make sacrifices for America and to make sacrifices for those who looked to America for hope and rescue.

With the lever of American patriotism, he lifted up the world. And so today, the world in Prague, in Budapest, in Warsaw, in Sofia, in Bucharest, in Kiev and in Moscow itself—the world mourns the passing of the great liberator and echoes his prayer God bless America.

Ronald Reagan's life was rich not only in public achievement, but also in private happiness. Indeed, his public achievements were rooted in his private happiness.

The great turning point of his life was his meeting and marriage with Nancy. On that, we have the plain testimony of a loving and grateful husband. "Nancy came along and saved my soul."

We share her grief today, but we also share her pride and the grief and pride of Ronnie's children. For the final years of his life, Ronnie's mind was clouded by illness. That cloud has now lifted. He is himself again, more himself than at any time on this earth, for we may be sure that the Big fellow upstairs never forgets those who remember Him. And as the last journey of this faithful pilgrim took him beyond the sunset, and as heaven's morning broke, I like to think, in the words of Bunyan, that "all the trumpets sounded on the other side."

We here still move in twilight, but we have one beacon to guide us that Ronald Reagan never had. We have his example. Let us give thanks today for a life that achieved so much for all of God's children.

EULOGY FOR ROSA PARKS BY OPRAH WINFREY

"...God uses good people to do great things."

Reverend Braxton, family, friends, admirers, and this amazing choir:

I—I feel it an honor to be here to come and say a final goodbye.

I grew up in the South, and Rosa Parks was a hero to me long before I recognized and understood the power and impact that her life embodied. I remember my father telling me about this colored woman who had refused to give up her seat. And in my child's mind, I thought, "She must be really big." I

thought she must be at least a hundred feet tall. I imagined her being stalwart and strong and carrying a shield to hold back the white folks.

And then I grew up and had the esteemed honor of meeting her. And wasn't that a surprise. Here was this petite, almost delicate lady who was the personification of grace and goodness. And I thanked her then. I said, "Thank you," for myself and for every colored girl, every colored boy, who didn't have heroes who were celebrated.

I thanked her then.

And after our first meeting I realized that God uses good people to do great things. And I'm here today to say a final thank you, Sister Rosa, for being a great woman who used your life to serve, to serve us all. That day that you refused to give up your seat on the bus, you, Sister Rosa, changed the trajectory of my life and the lives of so many other people in the world. I would not be standing here today nor standing where I stand every day had she not chosen to sit down. I know that. I know that. I know that. I know that, and I honor that. Had she not chosen to say we shall not—we shall not be moved.

So I thank you again, Sister Rosa, for not only confronting the one white man who[se] seat you took, not only confronting the bus driver, not only for confronting the law, but for confronting history, a history that for 400 years said that you were not even worthy of a glance, certainly no consideration. I thank you for not moving.

And in that moment when you resolved to stay in that seat, you reclaimed your humanity and you gave us all back a piece of our own. I thank you for that. I thank you for acting without concern. I often thought about what that took, knowing the climate of the times and what could have happened to you, what it took to stay seated. You acted without concern for yourself and made life better for us all. We shall not be moved.

I marvel at your will.

I celebrate your strength to this day.

And I am forever grateful, Sister Rosa, for your courage, your conviction.

I owe you—to succeed.

I will not be moved.