

THE Carter / Mondale Letter

Spring 2007

Vol. 2, Issue 2

The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century

University of Georgia conference looks back at Carter-Mondale administration

At a three-day conference in January, participants offered a new way to see the Carter-Mondale presidency: a success obscured by a bitter fourth year. Former administration officials, journalists, and historians analyzed how the policies of the Carter presidency have shaped the present and might influence the future at the University of Georgia-sponsored event.

Panelists from both political parties met and talked openly—sometimes respectfully disagreeing—about the legacy of the Carter administration and what it can teach current politicians.

According to presidential historian and conference guest Michael Beschloss, history needs 25 years before it can sort out the effects of an administration; this conference ended 25 years to the day Carter left office. Thus, “The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century” provided a

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This special edition of the Carter/Mondale Letter recaps a conference on the Carter presidency held at the University of Georgia Jan. 19–21, 2007.

The conference reviewed Carter-Mondale administration policies and looked at how those policies have shaped the present and might influence the future. The conference was developed by Hamilton Jordan and officials at the university where Jordan is a visiting fellow.

Special thanks to University of Georgia photographers who provided the pictures in this newsletter.



President Carter addresses the conference audience.

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Conference

means to examine Jimmy Carter's presidency at just the right distance, when the shift from journalism to history begins.

The conference, held Jan. 19–21, 2007, was sold out for most sessions. Attendees included academics from across the United States, many students from the University of Georgia, media, and dozens of former Carter-Mondale administration officials and campaign staff. The conference was developed by Hamilton Jordan and officials at the University of Georgia where Jordan is a visiting fellow.

"If there's a lesson that comes out of this conference, I hope it is that we can one day return to an age when people can have differences of opinion and talk to each other instead of just shouting at each other," John Maltese, conference director, said.

Friday panels concentrated on the Carter-Mondale administration's place in history and a wide range of topics, including the role of the vice president, domestic and foreign policy, budget, legal affairs, presidential leadership, interaction with Congress, the media and interest groups, and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter's role in mental health issues. Academic scholars and students from across the United States pre-



Rex Granum discusses the institution of the presidency.

sented papers on these and other subjects, and former administration personnel made comments and rebutted some of the assumptions of the scholars.

On Saturday, former Carter-Mondale intern Brian Williams, now anchor and managing editor of "NBC Nightly News," introduced panels on domestic and foreign policy. He also moderated a lively town hall meeting with students. Michael Beschloss gave the keynote address on the importance of the conference. Panel moderators on Saturday and Sunday included Beschloss and Williams along with Jay Hakes, director of the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum; Jon Meacham, editor of Newsweek magazine; and Chris

Matthews, anchor of "Hardball with Chris Matthews."

Carter's final address at the conference was a call for peace and negotiation—two hallmarks of his tenure.

"This is the greatest nation on Earth. We can be received by all leaders and all citizens with open arms. And they are so hungry for the fire, light, and leadership of this great nation. They want the simple things that every American would agree on. They want their children to be educated, they want their babies to survive, and they want some help if they have a disease," he said.

"I think we can be on the threshold of a new greatness. We are the greatest nation on Earth, and I'm very grateful for the people who let me be governor and president and let me play a role in that."



Jerry Rafshoon listens during a discussion of papers presented on Friday.

The proceedings of "The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century" were professionally recorded and are available for purchase. The eight-DVD set includes all plenary sessions and panel discussions on the main stage, the town hall discussion, and the program portion of the reception honoring Vice President and Mrs. Mondale, the luncheon honoring Mrs. Carter, and the inaugural anniversary dinner featuring a keynote address by President Carter. Note that none of the Friday morning breakout sessions is included.

The DVDs can be ordered from the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government for \$26.95, including shipping and handling. A coffee table style book on the conference is also available from the Vinson Institute for \$50.97. All orders must be prepaid (check, MasterCard, or Visa) or submitted on purchase orders. Order online at www.vinsoninstitute.org/store or send mail or fax orders to Publications Program, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, 201 N. Milledge Ave., Athens, GA 30602-5482; fax: (706) 542-6239. For information, call (706) 542-6214.

Mondale Criticizes Cheney

Former vice president says Cheney has stepped over the line, undermining Bush

By Richard Hyatt

ATHENS, Ga.—Vice President Dick Cheney has stepped over the line and is undermining information delivered to the White House, one of his predecessors said Friday.

“If I had done what this vice president has done, Jimmy Carter would have thrown me out of the White House,” former Vice President Walter Mondale said at a conference marking the 30th anniversary of Carter’s inauguration.

Stuart Eizenstat, Carter’s chief domestic policy adviser, connected President Bush to the issue by saying that “a vice president can’t become too strong unless the president allows it or wants it.”

Mondale said a vice president should be there to help the president and ensure that the information the White House is given “is open and unintended.” In Mondale’s eyes, Cheney has been undermining what Bush hears.

“He has pushed through ideas, and a vice president should not pressure the process,” Mondale said.

These observations came during the opening session of “The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century.” The three-day conference at the University of Georgia has attracted an impressive lineup of scholars as well as key members of the Carter administration.

The opening discussion was an examination of the vice presidency and how the Carter-Mondale team reshaped a forgotten office that was sometimes referred to as a constitutional afterthought.

Under Carter, the former U.S. senator from Minnesota moved his office into the West Wing of the White

House, had daily access to the president and was a senior adviser to the chief executive.

“The modern vice presidency began Jan. 21, 1977,” said Richard Moe, Mondale’s chief of staff and another member of Friday’s panel. “This was a strategic, permanent transformation.”

Mondale was the first vice president who was second to the president in the chain of command.

“We were making this up as we went along,” he admitted. “We had no road map.”

Thirty years ago today, Carter took the oath of office, elected on the heels of Watergate and with respect for the presidency at a low point. His journey to the White House was laid out by former adviser Hamilton Jordan, an ally since Carter was governor of Georgia.

Jordan, former White House chief of staff, is now affiliated with UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute for Government. The conference became his dream. He promised he could



Walter Mondale discusses the vice presidency.



(From left) Jay Hakes, director of the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum and panel moderator; Walter Mondale; Stuart Eizenstat; and Dick Moe, former chief of staff for Mondale.

get the Carter people here.

“And everyone we asked said yes,” said University of Georgia President Michael Adams.

In the afternoon session on image, former communications chief Gerald Rafshoon and former Deputy Secretary Rex Granum said substance, not communications, was the administration’s priority.

Rafshoon said their 1977 decision to eliminate the position of communications



Stuart Eizenstat helped to shape all domestic policy discussions during the Carter administration.

director was a mistake. “We were overreacting to Nixon,” he said. “It wasn’t the organization of the White House that was wrong. It was the people. They had perverted the system by lying.”

Former Press Secretary Jody Powell, always ready to throw a well-placed jab, was asked about the administration’s relationship with Washington reporters.

Powell shared a story often told in Georgia about former Gov. Lester Maddox. Maddox was asked about the state’s prison system, and he said their problems could be solved if they could get a better class of prisoners.

“You can apply that to journalism,” Powell laughed
Richard Hyatt writes for the Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer. This article was reprinted from the Ledger-Enquirer with permission.

Panelists: U.S. Needs to Develop Other Fuel Sources

By Andrea Sarisky

The U.S. uses energy more efficiently today than 30 years ago, but there is a current need to focus on developing alternative fuel sources and reducing dependence on foreign sources of energy, according to Stuart Eizenstat, former chief domestic affairs adviser.

Eizenstat was part of a three-member panel that discussed domestic policy relating to energy and the environment as part of the conference.

The other two members of the panel, former U.S. Sen. Howard Baker and David Hawkins, director of the National Resources Defense Council Climate Center, both expressed similar sentiments during the panel session “Energy, Conservation, and the Environment.”

Energy policy and its subsequent impact on the environment, which were major issues during the Carter presidency, have reappeared as pivotal issues today.

“Global warming is a problem that was recognized during the Carter administration, but then it was ignored,” said Hawkins about the inter-

section of energy policy and the environment. “Since 2000 and 2001, it has been basically a retrograde operation. We’re now coming out of that, recognizing that we need to do something about it. The issue of oil dependence and global warming is a classic example of the need to integrate energy and environmental policy.”

Although the panelists held varying viewpoints on many of the issues discussed, the underlying tone of all three panelists’ responses showed that there is still room for improvement in creating environmentally sound energy policy.

Andrea Sarisky is a writer for Columns, the faculty/staff newspaper of the University of Georgia. This article was reprinted from Columns with permission.



(From left) Jay Hakes, director of the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum and panel moderator; former Tennessee Sen. Howard Baker; Stuart Eizenstat; David Hawkins, director of Natural Resources Defense Council Climate Center.

Foreign Exchange

By Matt Weeks

Jimmy Carter's foreign affairs policies were politically costly but advantageous over the long range, a group of panelists at the Carter conference said.

From giving away the Panama Canal to engaging unfriendly world leaders, Carter's policies benefited America and the world, said Robert Pastor, the former director of Latin American Affairs on the National Security Council.

"People say that Carter is the greatest ex-president, and I don't think there's any question that's true, but that comment is sometimes used to try to diminish his presidency," Pastor said.

"He normalized relations with China, he did the Panama Canal treaty, he transformed the view of America and our impact on human rights, democracy turned the corner in Latin America during his administration, multilateral treaties



Foreign policy panelists (from left): Michael Beschloss, panel moderator; Madeleine Albright, former secretary of state; Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser; Donald McHenry, former U.N. ambassador; and Robert Pastor, former director of Latin American Affairs for the National Security Council.



Middle East, defense and intelligence panelists (from left): Jon Meacham, managing editor of Newsweek and panel moderator; Madeleine Albright; Howard Baker; Zbigniew Brzezinski; and Admiral Stansfield Turner, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

with other countries were passed overwhelmingly, but the American people tend to view his presidency as a failed administration," he added.

The panel served as a forum to discuss why people then and now saw Carter's policies as weak and how those decisions look now with the benefit of hindsight. With foreign affairs, especially with the Middle East, playing a significant role in present-day politics, comparisons between Carter's approaches and the Bushes' approaches came up often.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's foreign policy adviser, offered a comparison between Carter's dealings in Panama and the current policy on Iraq.

"We tend to see ourselves as playing a significant role in Iraqi freedom, but we don't try to see it from their perspective. The Iraqi perception is that the 20th century is a century of their struggle against colonialism," he said, recalling how the Iraqis struggled against foreign rulers, such as the British, in the past 100 years.

"Although we live in a post-colonial age, for the people that are involved, we are waging what is essentially a colonial war. That's terribly important to understand if you want to be effective on the world stage. We understood that in Panama. I don't think we understand that in regard to Iraq," he said.

Matt Weeks writes for Columns, the faculty/staff newspaper of the University of Georgia. This article was reprinted from Columns with permission.



Zbigniew Brzezinski and Stansfield Turner



Madeleine Albright and Howard Baker

Carter's Judicial Selection Process a Hot Topic at Event

Ohio academic says former president's confirmation tactics helped to shape the current system—for better and for worse

By Alyson M. Palmer

Former President Jimmy Carter's personal involvement in judicial selection caused more women and minorities to get on the federal bench—and may have set the stage for the divisive confirmation process today.

That was a finding of one academic who took part in a Friday morning discussion of Carter's legal legacy, held at the University of Georgia as part of a weekend commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Carter's 1977 inauguration.

Other activities included appearances by Justice Stephen G. Breyer, who was scheduled to participate as a panelist at a Saturday session on the economy, budget issues, and deregulation and met in a closed session with students and faculty at the University of Georgia's law school Saturday. Carter nominated Breyer to the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in November 1980.

Carter's judicial nominations were driven by two factors—increasing diversity on the bench and pursuing

substantive policy goals, embodied by the insistence that nominees have a “commitment to equal justice,” said Ohio State University political science professor Elliot Slotnick.

The former president's increased involvement in selecting nominees encroached on the historic prerogative of senators, said Slotnick.

Carter's approach eschewed traditional criteria for judges and, as a result, risked lower American Bar Association (ABA) ratings for his nominees, said Terrence Adamson, former chief spokesman for Carter's Department of Justice and a participant in Friday's legal affairs panel.

“He was preparing to cut the ABA out... they were mired into some pretty lockstep requirements,” recalled Adamson of Carter's approach.

Adamson recalled that Carter teased his attorney general, Griffin B. Bell, to make his point that traditional criteria were not necessary, telling Bell that he had learned that Bell had never written a law review article before President John F. Kennedy appointed him to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The result was increased diversity on the bench. When Carter took office, there were two black male judges and one active female judge on the Court of Appeals, said Slotnick, and 20 black or Hispanic judges and five women among more than 400 District Court judges. In his four years, Carter appointed 40 women and 55 ethnic minorities to



Bruce Kirschenbaum, formerly with the Carter administration's Intergovernmental Affairs Office



Brian Williams discusses legal and deregulation issues with Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer.

the federal bench, said Slotnick.

Calling the focus on diversity “benign,” Slotnick referred to another professor’s research that showed that the appointments of women and minorities did not result in weakened credentials on the bench.

But the increased focus on policy considerations and decreased deference by the administration to senatorial wishes may have had unintended—and unwelcome—consequences, Slotnick suggested. Carter’s more policy-oriented, president-centered approach led to the “dysfunctional” system of today, said Slotnick—one that is more divisive, contrarian, and marked by obstruction and delay.

“Clearly the Carter reforms stirred the pot... and raised the temperature,” Slotnick told the group.

But Adamson said it was never a goal to have more Democrats on the Court of Appeals, noting Carter’s appointments of Republicans to judicial posts.

Adamson said that Carter wanted his Department of Justice to be a “neutral” zone, following on the heels of President Gerald Ford’s post-Watergate push in that direction.

Carter’s judicial nominations were driven by two factors—increasing diversity on the bench and pursuing substantive policy goals.

Adamson said Bell had a rule that no one in the White House could call anyone at the Justice Department whose rank fell below a certain level. And Adamson recalled a time when Bell enforced that rule against an apparent breach with a call to Carter.

Todd Collins, a University of Georgia graduate student who participated in the legal affairs panel, noted that more than 14 percent of Carter’s nominees to the Court of Appeals have served more than 26 years—so far, a better



Former Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum

longevity record than any president from Kennedy to Ronald Reagan. Carter didn’t nominate anyone to the U.S. Supreme Court, but two of his nominees to other judicial posts, Breyer and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, ultimately made it there.

University of Georgia law professor Dan T. Coenen moderated the Saturday session featuring Breyer, which was closed to nearly all but students and faculty. Coenen said about 100 people were in the room with Breyer, who answered about eight questions.

“He emphasized that he does basically what students do, which is to read and write about law,” said Coenen.

One question from the audience asked Breyer if he were ever surprised by public reaction to the high court’s decisions, in particular the strong

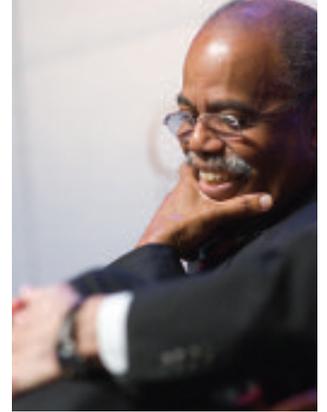
public reaction to the court’s 2005 decision in *Kelo v. New London*, which held that local governments may condemn property in favor of developments that pay higher property taxes.

“He noted that he was a bit surprised by the intensity of the reaction to that decision and wondered whether it might have been in retrospect useful to write the decision in a way that spelled out in a somewhat more understandable way why the court decided the case the way it did,” Coenen said of Breyer’s response.

Coenen noted that former 9th Circuit Judge Shirley M. Hufstедler, the lone female judge on the Court of Appeals when Carter took office and Carter’s secretary of education, attended the law school session with Breyer. According to Coenen, Carter noted during the weekend conference that, had there been a Supreme Court vacancy during his term, Hufstедler would have been his nominee.

Alyson M. Palmer writes for The Daily Report, the official legal newspaper of Fulton County (Ga.) and source for legal news across Georgia. This article was reprinted from The Daily Report with permission.

Snapshots from the Conference



Donald McHenry

Above: Carter legacy and post-presidency panelists (from left): Jon Meacham; presidential historian Michael Beschloss; John Hardman, president of The Carter Center; pollster Peter Hart.



Right: (From left) Frank Moore, Jody Powell, and Jerry Rafshoon discuss the organization of the White House and its interaction with Congress, interest groups, and the media.



Carter administration and campaign alumni who attended the conference



Left: Brian Williams (far left) discusses the Carter White House with (from left) Jon Meacham, Hamilton Jordan, Jerry Rafshoon, John Hardman, and Michael Beschloss.



Robert Rubin, former secretary of the treasury, discusses the economic policy of the Carter administration.



Herky Harris and Frank Moore discuss congressional water projects and congressional relations.



The Mondales and Carters enjoy a presentation.



Zbigniew Brzezinski

Former First Lady Sheds Light on Private Thoughts Behind Public Face

By Allyson Mann

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter delivered the keynote address at a luncheon held in her honor Jan. 20 as part of the conference.

Displaying warmth, humor, humility, a steely resolve, and, occasionally, tears, Carter recounted the high points of her life as first lady of both Georgia and the United States, shedding light on the private thoughts behind the public face.

Exactly 30 years ago to the day, she recalled watching Jimmy Carter recite the oath of office for the presidency. Observing those in attendance, she noted the trust and faith they had in her husband.

“It was a humbling experience,” she said.

Later that afternoon, she found humor in her new surroundings at the White House. Told that she could pick up the phone and talk to anyone in the world, the new first lady picked up the phone and asked for Jimmy.

“Jimmy who?” replied the operator.

As first lady, Mrs. Carter surprised many when she eschewed the traditionally narrow role in favor of more active duties as advocate and government representative. She also revealed a quiet determination on the subjects of mental illness and child immunization—two of her pet projects as

first lady and then later through her work with The Carter Center, established in 1982 in Atlanta after the Carters left the White House. Her interest in mental health issues developed during her husband’s campaign for governor.

“When I was campaigning, people talked to me about their problems,” she said. “Many had a family member with mental illness. I was moved.”

At a round-table discussion devoted to her work on mental health policy held Jan. 19, participants paid tribute to Mrs. Carter’s hard work and dedication.

Carter served as honorary chairperson of the President’s

Commission on Mental Health during her husband’s administration. When she began attending Cabinet meetings, and when she traveled to Latin America in an official capacity, she discovered that both the American public and the rest of the world were critical of her expanded role as first lady.

“I was just doing what I had been doing all my life in my marriage with Jimmy Carter—being a partner,” she said.

Allyson Mann writes for Georgia magazine, published by Georgia Electric Membership Corporation. This article was reprinted with permission.



Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter discusses her mental health advocacy.



Mrs. Carter, Joan Mondale, and Walter Mondale listen during the luncheon honoring Mrs. Carter.

More Than 1,000 Turn Out for Conversation with Carters During Town Hall Meeting

By Kelly Simmons

NBC anchor Brian Williams launched the town hall meeting with former President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter with his own question: Which one thing would you disclose to the audience for the first time ever?



Williams, who was moderating the event, gave the Carters an hour to think about it, at the end of the meeting returning for a response.

His wife at his side,

the president told a story of his 1978 meeting with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin at Camp David. Carter had brought the two men together to pursue peace between their warring nations.

After three days, Carter told the audience, it was clear that the men would do nothing but argue. Carter separated the two leaders and went back and forth between them in an attempt to negotiate an agreement.

Without telling Carter, a frustrated Sadat decided to return to Egypt and called a helicopter to take him to the airport in Washington.

"I was stricken," Carter said. "Sadat had been my friend."

Carter changed from his casual clothes into a suit and tie, went into a back room, knelt, and prayed.

"I asked God to help me," Carter said, his voice breaking. He went to Sadat's cabin, where the suitcases had been packed and were ready to be picked up. He told the Egyptian leader that if he left, "our friendship was severed forever."

Sadat walked to a corner of the room, then came back and said, "I'm staying."

It was a powerful and poignant end to what was perhaps the most anticipated event of the three-day symposium. At the Carters' request, the town hall meeting was free and open to the public. More than 1,000 people turned out for the event, held in a room that could seat just 600. Many watched the conversation on closed-circuit television at the University of Georgia. It also was televised live on C-SPAN. For more than the scheduled hour, both Carters fielded questions ranging from their work with the Atlanta-based Carter Center for human rights to the recent controversy over Carter's book "Palestine Peace Not Apartheid."

Alan Godlas, a University of Georgia religion professor, asked why there was so much conflicting information about the war in Iraq and whether the media covering the president was to blame.

"I don't think the news media did their job," Carter said. "Congress didn't either."

Kelly Simmons writes for Georgia magazine, published by Georgia Electric Membership Corporation. This article was reprinted with permission.



Student Panel Discusses Policy Decisions with Former President

By Kelly Simmons

University of Georgia honors students turned the tables on former President Jimmy Carter during the conference, analyzing his policy decisions and recommending ways they could be used to shape future foreign and domestic policy.

Economics, energy, nuclear nonproliferation, Islamic radicalism, Middle East policy, and human rights were the issues the students studied and evaluated over the past few months to ready themselves for their panel discussion, which Carter specifically requested be a part of the symposium.

Carter was a participant in the session, moderated by Thomas P. Lauth, dean of the School of Public and International Affairs. The former president first listened attentively as six of the students summarized their findings, both praising and criticizing the Carter administration's policy decisions.

Among the students' recommendations for current and future presidential administrations:

- Resurrect efforts begun under the Carter administration to create a renewable and sustainable energy industry to promote conservation and alternative fuel use.
- Re-establish diplomatic ties with Iran to support the country's democratic population over a fundamentalist regime, using trade as an incentive to persuade the government to

improve its human rights record.

- Renew efforts to bring peace to the Middle East by bringing together leaders from Israel and Palestine.
- Reaffirm the commitment of the U.S. to human rights domestically and throughout the world.

The student panelists were given the opportunity to ask Carter questions.

Helen Smith, a senior from Charlotte, asked how he would address the situation at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where suspected terrorists are being held without charges or legal representation.

"Close it down," Carter said without hesitation. "It has been an abomination and a disgrace to our country."

Kelly Simmons writes for Georgia magazine, published by Georgia Electric Membership Corporation. This article was reprinted with permission.



Journalists Discuss Carter's Political Rise ... And Fall

By Matt Weeks

The Carter administration provided a perfect mix of an underdog story, uncontrollable events, and big personalities to ensure a political epic, a group of journalists said in the "Press and the Presidency" panel session. The discussion covered Carter's tenure in national politics and the media engines that propelled him into and out of office.

"The beginning was almost magical," PBS reporter Judy Woodruff said. "You had somebody come out of nowhere. There was almost a love affair between many in the press and this little-known governor from Georgia who had risen to power."

But it didn't last. Just four days after the Iran hostage crisis began, ABC News premiered "Nightline," which on a nightly basis displayed a tracker counting the days since the scandal began.

"I remember on the night before the '80 election, the lead story wasn't the presidential election, the lead story was the hostage crisis anniversary. I think that was a nail in the coffin," said moderator Chris Matthews, host of "Hardball" on MSNBC.

A political story like Carter's, which boasted a prominent rise and sharp fall, is the kind that many media outlets savor, said Jon Meacham, editor of Newsweek.

"I don't think the press is ideologically driven. We're conflict driven and change driven... and that can produce some difficulties," he said.

This Carter phenomena set the stage for later political stories, Meacham added. He pointed to Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, who also has garnered massive amounts of media attention.

Maybe Obama should be careful. Carter ended the session by referring to a recent study concluding that for the 48 months he was in office, only one month produced more positive coverage than negative.

"It was my first month," he said. "After that... well, you know."



President Carter asks a question during the "Press and the Presidency" session.

Matt Weeks writes for Columns, the faculty/staff newspaper of the University of Georgia. This article was reprinted from Columns with permission.



Jody Powell discusses how the media covered the administration.

New Look at Carter Presidency a Long-Overdue Reassessment

By Les Francis

Just over three decades ago on Jan. 20, 1977, Jimmy Carter was sworn in as our 39th president. I remember the day well — the sun was bright, the air frigid, and the ground frozen. I was thrilled to be in the audience for the inauguration because I had been an early Carter supporter, and I had worked in his campaign. We were excited at the possibilities of a new era in Washington and at the promise of a different kind of national leadership.

On the 30th anniversary of that hopeful day, a few hundred people—including President and Mrs. Carter, Vice President and Mrs. Mondale, historians, journalists, campaign veterans, former administration officials, and "just plain folks" gathered at the University of Georgia to recount the four years of the Carter presidency—its ups and its downs. We reflected on our times in office, we laughed at funny stories, and we got choked up at particularly poignant moments.

Most of all, we celebrated the fact that an important and long-overdue reassessment of our administration seems to be

underway. The second look at Jimmy Carter's term in office seems to have been fueled by at least two factors: first, the extraordinary accomplishments of his post-presidency and the deep respect for Carter that has developed among people the world over; second, the incompetence and hubris that have characterized the current administration and that have left many of us disappointed and in search of "good old days" wherever we can find them.

Sessions at the recent conference served to remind attendees, and those watching the proceedings on C-SPAN, of the many crucial and difficult issues that the Carter administration confronted and the initiatives he undertook as a result—the Panama Canal treaties, normalization of relations with communist China, the energy crisis, hair-trigger tensions in the Middle East, the continuing struggle with the Soviet Union, the drive to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, totalitarianism and human rights abuses in our own hemisphere, huge inflationary pressures that had been building for at least a decade, the early signs of globalization and resulting

economic dislocations in key parts of our nation, governmental reorganization, budgetary discipline, regulatory reform, opposition to affirmative action, and the rise of Islamic extremism in Iran.

In the mid- to late 1970s, all of these issues—and others—played out against a backdrop of new political realities in America, as the roles of and relationships between the legislative and executive branches of the federal government were being redefined in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate. At the same time, basic tenets of the Democratic Party were being recalibrated as it moved away from ideological moorings associated with FDR's New Deal and LBJ's Great Society.

Jimmy Carter was elected president precisely because his impatience with a “business as usual” approach to politics was shared by a majority of his fellow citizens. He was equally impatient with incrementalism, but that was a view not held by many of the people's elected representatives in Congress, especially its more senior and powerful members. These factors led to a style of governing that the always wise and witty former Vice President Fritz Mondale explained “front-loaded pain and back-loaded pleasure.”

Earlier assessments of Jimmy Carter's presidency started from the premise that it had “failed”—where failure was defined in electoral terms. Indeed, if the voters in a single election are considered the first and ultimate arbiters of presidential success, then there can be no disputing the notion that Carter failed; after all, we lost our re-election bid to Ronald Reagan in 1980. However, a different consensus begins to emerge if that defeat is put in a larger context, if it is understood that Carter knowingly imperiled his own presidency by the stands and risks he took. Jimmy Carter was determined to do what was right or necessary despite the political downsides—those of us on his staff learned quickly not to try to persuade him to adopt one policy option over another based on political arguments. From inside the West Wing, time and again I saw President Carter take one truly gutsy step after another, spending his political capital in the longer term interests of the country. If that is a definition of failure, then we should come up with better ways to measure our political leaders.

I am more convinced than ever that we are better off today because Jimmy Carter was once our president. And America will be well-served by future presidents who are, we can only hope, as decent, as intellectually curious, as visionary, and as courageous as the one-time peanut farmer from Plains, Ga.

Les Francis, a native of San Jose, Calif., and a graduate of San Jose State University, served as deputy chief of staff in President Jimmy Carter's White House and as executive director of the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. He wrote this article for the (San Jose) Mercury News. It is reprinted here with permission.

A Peacemaker from the Past

By Tim Kraft

*“We told the truth, we upheld the law, and we kept the peace.”
— former Vice President Walter Mondale, January 2007*

In mid-January, my wife and I participated in a three-day symposium on the Carter presidency held at the University of Georgia.

A good portion of younger Sun-News readers may reiterate the question the country posed in 1975 and 1976: “Jimmy who?” It has been, after all, 26 years and four presidents ago.

Or many will repeat the phrase I hear so often: “He's the best ex-president we ever had,” the not-so-subtle implication being that his one term was less than successful.

The Carters themselves contribute to this conundrum with their unflagging good works around the world: The Carter Center is a truly dynamic foundation that works to attack disease and poverty and to mediate disputes and monitor elections. Rosalynn Carter's efforts to address the problems of the mentally ill are ongoing. Jimmy Carter accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of his wife, himself, and the Center they serve.

A recurring theme of the Georgia symposium was the number of politically risky steps that Carter took while in office, the sole criterion for him being “what is best for the country in the long run?” The panels provided many cogent examples of this approach. In this limited space, let me cite three that are pertinent to today's problems: the energy program and treaties in Central America and the Middle East.

In just his first months in office, Carter perceived an impending energy crisis and told Americans “with the exception of preventing war, this is the greatest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes.” He sent to the

Congress a comprehensive and vastly ambitious bill with 113 interlocking provisions that included a gasoline tax, a tax on inefficient cars, conservation measures, inducements for industry to use more coal, and tax credits for solar development.

Carter fought for these and other substantive components for four years and succeeded with most of the package, including a Department of Energy. The department still exists, but in the subsequent 12 years of the Reagan and Bush presidencies, much of the Carter program was dismantled or ignored. And for this, our energy problems are exponentially worse.

Not many will recall the flash points of violence in our own hemisphere, but the Isthmus of Panama was indeed a hot spot for Presidents Johnson, Nixon, and Ford. They chose to ignore the Panamanians' desire to unite their land and administer the canal that bisected it. Carter was advised to "tackle that one in the second term"; there is no U.S. constituency for redressing this situation, and it would be political suicide to do it.

He chose to do the right thing, simply put, and pushed negotiations to the point where the U.S. Senate was asked to ratify a new treaty that ceded the canal to the Panamanians over a period of time. This action cost several U. S. senators their re-election bids and added to the re-election problems of President Carter.

More readers will probably recall the Camp David Accords that constitute the historic peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, an agreement that still stands. Only avid



Tim Kraft (left) discusses the historical impact of the Carter presidency as Phil Wise, vice president of The Carter Center, listens.

students of this event will learn to appreciate the truly unprecedented negotiation efforts and skills that Carter employed to almost single-handedly bring the Middle East antagonists to an accord. President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It might be noted that Carter's similar award was only the third that has been bestowed upon a U.S. president.

A recurring theme of the symposium was the number of politically risky steps that Carter took while in office.

An overarching theme of Carter's campaigns, his presidency, and his work with The Carter Center is his bedrock dedication to human rights. To Carter, these rights, at a minimum, include those civil and political rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Carter has used this moral Magna Carta in more than one rebuke to totalitarian regimes, from China to Cuba. Coincidentally, the new defense secretary, Robert Gates, who served under Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, writes in his memoirs that Carter's emphasis on human rights cast a spotlight on the Soviets' greatest vulnerability. As reported by Thomas Ricks in the Washington Post, the human rights theme made Carter, according to Gates, "the first president during the Cold War to challenge publicly and consistently the legitimacy of Soviet rule at home."

Last week in Georgia, Carter keynoted the symposium with his personal vision of human rights that also encompassed a warning.

He noted that the U.S. military budget is about equal to that of all other nations combined and that our cultural and economic power is vast. But we are not using this power, he noted, to solve what he termed "the greatest problem in the world today—the growing chasm between rich and poor people and rich and poor nations."

This former president, 82 years young, has traveled the globe tirelessly and has observed firsthand the problems of which he speaks. He has been right on so many profound moral issues of our times—race relations, nuclear proliferation, negotiating for peace—that we ignore this warning at our peril.

Tim Kraft wrote this op/ed piece for the Las Cruces (N.M.) Sun-News. It is reprinted here with permission.

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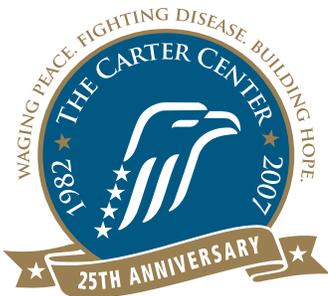
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Drop us a line and let us know what you're doing. Items can be sent to Jay Beck, The Carter Center, One Copenhill, 453 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307; Fax (404) 892-9438; E-mail jbeck4@emory.edu.



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