

EMINENTOES



THE LITTLEST EX-PRESIDENT

by Joseph Rodota

We knew in 1980, of course, that Jimmy Carter was mean-spirited, ill-mannered, and short-tempered. What we didn't know then was that he was on his best behavior.

Since leaving office, Jimmy Carter has blasted Ronald Reagan for the 1986 bombing of Libya; praised Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's "excellent" arms control policies; defended the foreign policy meddling of House Speaker Jim Wright; and confidently asserted: "We had very few outbreaks of terrorism when I was president." He has called George Bush "effeminate" and told Jerry Falwell to "go to hell." He has called the Democratic party "an albatross around my neck" and accused New York Mayor Ed Koch of stabbing him in the back. Even the hopelessly inoffensive *Time* magazine columnist Hugh Sidey has been a target, simply because Sidey once suggested that the Carter White House lacked class. "I asked the Lord to help me forgive Sidey," Carter says. "But so far the Lord has not responded."

So how are ex-presidents supposed to behave? Simple: with respect for the Oval Office and civility toward its occupants. They follow the example (among thirty-seven others) of Dwight Eisenhower. When, in 1965, reporters pressed Eisenhower on a train trip for his reaction to the invasion of South Vietnam by North Vietnam, and to President Johnson's request for \$700 million in arms to fight the Communists, Ike kept his counsel. He later wrote Johnson:

At almost every stop along the way, I was asked by some newspaperman about the situation in Vietnam. I have consistently said (and shall continue to say) that, first, we should all understand that there is only one spokesman for America in conducting our current foreign relations: the President of the United States. . . .

To this I add that if there is any who oppose the President in his conduct of our

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foreign affairs, he should send his views on a confidential basis to the Administration; none of us should try to divide the support that citizens owe to their Head of State in critical international situations.

With warm personal regard and great respect,

Sincerely,

Dwight D. Eisenhower

This should not be a terribly difficult example to follow, although in mitigation it is worth remembering that the aging Carters' first taste of retirement was bitter. Jimmy and Rosalynn returned to Plains humiliated and nearly broke. The peanut business was in the tank. Amy was careening towards puberty.

Seven years later, however, Jimmy has managed to patch his life together and make a few bucks. He has written books (three of them, one with the help of Rosalynn). He has supervised the construction of a \$27 million presidential library and educational center. And he's become a fixture on the liberal charity circuit, sharing platforms with Ted Turner, John Denver, Yoko Ono, Houston socialite Dominique de Menil, and other former constituents. His friends have given him thirty-five china place settings for use at his presidential library. (The frugal Carters hadn't ordered any while at the White House.) In 1985, for the first time in five years, Jimmy Carter actually made the *Good Housekeeping* list of the Ten Most Admired Men (he was eighth—sandwiched between Bob Hope and Jacques Cous-

teau). And just this summer, the managers of the Democratic convention even let Jimmy speak during prime time from Atlanta.

None of which has improved the Carter disposition. Jimmy is not the first President to attempt a little image-boosting after leaving the White House, of course, but he is unique in that he has attempted to salvage his reputation primarily by trashing his successor's.

Carter kept his mouth shut for most of Reagan's first term, but his simmering rage finally boiled over in March 1986, when he accused Reagan of "habitually" misstating the Carter Administration's record on defense modernization. Reagan had pointed out that under previous management our armed forces boasted planes that couldn't fly and ships that couldn't sail, for lack of spare parts and trained personnel. Carter told a *New York Times* reporter that Reagan was making statements about Carter-era defense policies "he knows are not true and which he personally promised me not to repeat." "Some of

his statements," Jimmy said, "are almost more than a human being can bear."

The same reporter then confronted Reagan in the Oval Office. This exchange is drawn from the official White House transcript for the March 21, 1986 interview:

Reporter: We would like to give you a chance to respond to Jimmy Carter, who said some not too favorable things about you in a recent interview with the *New*

York Times. He said you distort things, you exaggerate.

Reagan: . . . can you be specific? What are one or two of the things that he might have said?

Reporter: Well, he said that you have a habit of saying things that you know are not true, basically.

Reagan: Well, maybe he's just been too much victimized by that tendency for the media for a time to accuse me of gaffes, and that I am guilty of saying things that aren't true. . . .

Reporter: So you don't think you lie all the time? [Laughter.]

Reagan: No—so I don't have a habit of saying things that aren't true.

Reporter: Thank you.

Reagan: Why didn't he just accuse me of lying? [Laughter.]

Hours after the interview, Reagan telephoned the reporter. "It's been bothering me all day," he said. "I've been wondering all day about it. This whole thing—I felt very bad about it. It's not true I'm saying those things about him."

"I know I have made him a target on things like the economy," said Reagan. "But on defense, I knew in the last year, he himself recognized that defense was being shortchanged."

In rebuttal, Carter soon appeared on the "CBS Morning News." Asked if he was satisfied with Reagan's apology, Carter said, "Well, it depends on whether he's stopped misstating the facts. I hope he has seen the error of his ways and in the future he will tell the truth. This is something that he promised to do a couple of years ago, but, of course, he didn't do it."

Since then, Jimmy has gone on a spree.

In April 1986, he said that the Reagan Administration has "had no detectable achievements in foreign policy."

In May, after U.S. fighter planes bombed terrorist facilities in Libya, Carter lashed out at this "macho exertion of America's enormous power." Jimmy said he didn't think the bombing of Libyan targets "has reduced the incidence of terrorism—it's probably



Tom Wolfe

increased it." Of Moammar Qaddafi, who claimed to have lost a child in the bombing, Carter said, "If seventeen years ago, somebody had killed Amy, I would not have rested until her killer was punished."

In August, Carter said the Reagan farm policy "has been a disaster."

In September, he criticized Reagan over the handling of the Lebanese hostage situation. "He should have a much more aggressive policy for gaining their release," Carter said.

The same month, Jimmy condemned a routine nuclear weapons test by the United States as an "embarrassment and serious mistake" and said "the Reagan Administration has missed a wonderful opportunity for a comprehensive test ban in its determination to go ahead with the Star Wars program."

The gentleman-farmer from Plains couldn't find anything nice to say even as Reagan was en route to speak at the dedication of the Carter presidential library on October 1, 1986. A few hours before Air Force One touched down near Atlanta, Carter interrupted a tour of his presidential museum to declare, "We've had five-and-one-half years of no progress, even retrogression, for nuclear arms control."

On the eve of the Reykjavik summit later that month, Carter criticized Reagan for showing "extreme interest" in a meeting with Gorbachev. Immediately after the summit, Jimmy said that "Reagan missed a wonderful opportunity" by refusing to give up the Strategic Defense Initiative at Hovde House.

In March 1987, Carter visited Stanford University (currently run by his former Food and Drug Administration chief, Donald Kennedy) and announced, "I didn't see any greatness in sending troops to Grenada." The president who was in office when the Sandinistas came to power also said, "I think the major obstacle to progress toward peace in Central America under the Contadora umbrella or other initiatives has been the recalcitrance of the United States."

"In the 1970s," Carter told his attentive Stanford listeners, "under Ford and in my term, there were few who protested our nuclear policies because there was no doubt that we were supporters of nuclear arms control. At the time, the obstacles came from the Kremlin. Now the obstacles are in Washington."

Oh, for the days of killer rabbits!

Between book tours and international conferences on gum disease, the Carter clan racks up frequent-flier miles with excursions to various foreign capitals. In March 1986, Carter told a group of businessmen and diplomats in Cairo that Ronald Reagan "is

more inclined to form a contra army to overthrow the Sandinistas or inject the Marines into Lebanon or use American battleships to shell villages around Beirut" than to negotiate peace agreements. He denounced what he called "missing leadership" in Washington. "President Reagan has not been inclined to use negotiation and diplomacy as a means to achieve our nation's goals nearly so much as have his Dem-

ocratic and Republican predecessors," Carter said, adding, "I am not here to criticize my own government."

When Jimmy abruptly departed a Fourth of July party at the U.S. Embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe, after five minutes of a twenty-minute attack on the United States by Mr. David Kariamizira (the Zimbabwean Minister of Youth, Sport, and Culture), the *Washington Post* as-

signed page one acreage to the story.

The Minister had blasted Reagan for bombing Libya, applying economic pressure to Ortega and Qaddafi, and ignoring "terrorism" committed by South Africa. "It was an insult to my country and an insult to me personally," said Carter. Later he had a chance to clarify. "It wasn't what he said," the ex-president told Bryant Gumbel on the "Today" show the morning after. "It

Religion and the Life of the Intellect



In many intellectual circles the myth still circulates that religion is the preserve of the dim-witted and unlettered. Yet, recently *The New York Times Magazine* carried an article on the "return to religion" among intellectuals. From Harvard to Berkeley, and amid inquisitive people generally, there's an undeniable renewal of interest in the questions traditional religion raises and seeks to answer. This fascination is largely a result of the failures of secular substitutes for religion (such as rationalism, narcissism, technological utopianism, aestheticism, and extremist political ideologies) to give abidingly satisfying answers to the truly significant puzzles in life: goodness, suffering, love, death, and the meaning of it all.

By no means, however, does this religious renaissance entail embracing the ersatz gods of dog-eat-dog individualism, consumerism, or superpatriotism. Nor does it imply a retreat from working for peace, justice, or human dignity. Rather, there's an awareness that, as Jean Bethke Elshtain put it, religious commitment "can help further social reform," and that religion can supply the ethical bedrock upon which to make political choices which are far more durable than those based on passing ideologies and enthusiasms. Nor does the new openness to religion signify a hostility to science, but rather an appreciation of the limits of science and technology.

The New York Times Magazine article dis-

cussed the NEW OXFORD REVIEW as part of this return to religion, and rightly so. We at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW are spearheading today's intellectual engagement with what Daniel Bell terms "the sacred." We are particularly interested in exploring religious commitments that yield humane social consequences, as exemplified by such giants as St. Francis, Gandhi, Bonhoeffer, Barth, Tawney, Schumacher, Mounier, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Tutu, Lech Walesa, Martin Luther King Jr., and Archbishop Romero. And we probe the literary and philosophical riches offered by such greats as Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Buber, Auden, Eliot, Silone, Maritain, Waugh, Merton, C.S. Lewis, Simone Weil, Flannery O'Connor, and Graham Greene.

An ecumenical monthly edited by lay Catholics, we've been characterized by George Will as "splendid," by the University of Chicago's Martin E. Marty as "lively," by Berkeley's John T. Noonan Jr. as "indispensable," and by *Newsweek* as "thoughtful and often cheeky."

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was his way and the time he said it." The content, Jimmy added, was not "off the mark."

Closer to home, however, Jimmy Carter found himself deeply offended by the Iran-contra affair.

As the Reagan Administration was nearly consumed by the chaos of Iran-contra, Carter boasted: "We never considered, of course, paying any kind of ransom. We never delivered any weapons or any benefits to Ayatollah Khomeini."

"I wouldn't have been tempted," he told David Frost in December 1987. "To me, the bribery of kidnappers is unconscionable. It was never considered by me or any of my associates. . . ."

Gary Sick, a member of the Carter National Security Council, has written that on October 11, 1980—just a few

weeks before the election—President Carter approved the shipment to the Ayatollah of \$150 million in U.S. weapons which the Shah had ordered and paid for, but which had not been shipped.

Iran-contra, according to Carter, was even more serious than the transgressions of Richard Nixon. "Watergate was a very simple, relatively insignificant crime of breaking into an office and trying to steal some things from the Democratic Party," Carter said. "The Iran scandal has damaged our nation in . . . the Mideast Arabian Gulf area and internally as well."

But perhaps the best part about Iran-contra, from Jimmy's perspective, was that it provided a chance to relate his bizarre theories about why America turned him out of office in 1980.

David Frost asked Carter in Decem-

ber 1987 if he had "ever wondered at all whether supporters of President Reagan had contacts with [the Iranian government] to suggest a delay or suggest the timing of the release of the hostages?"

"Yes, I've wondered about it," Carter replied. "Those reports had been made to me, you know, for the last six years. . . . But it's not something that I care to pursue as an investigation. . . . It's not something that can be undone if it is true."

Carter had been peddling versions of this story for some time. "I wish I'd sent one more helicopter to Iran," Carter told *USA Today* in May 1986. "I think had our hostages in Iran been released early in the year, that I would have won the election without much of a problem."

"If Jimmy had bombed Tehran," Rosalynn told a press conference in

Reno, Nevada in 1987, "he probably would have been re-elected, but you can't do something just to be popular."

In Jimmy Carter's hands, the presidency itself seemed somehow diminished; and now the littlest president has become the littlest ex-president. He conducts himself like a fired employee who traipses from job interview to job interview, cataloging the alleged inadequacies of the man who replaced him and castigating his former boss. Americans may not know precisely how ex-presidents should conduct their affairs, except that they should be dignified, gracious if possible, and, well, "presidential." Jimmy Carter, alas, has proved himself unfit for ex-office. □

AMONG THE INTELLECTUALOIDS



RUSSELL MEANS ON CUSTER HILL

by Wayne Michael Sarf

Imagine, if you will, the reaction if a handful of "activists"—installing, perhaps in the interest of fairness, a small monument to draft dodgers or fallen NVA regulars—were to dig up the sod in front of Washington's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The vandals (assuming they had not been killed) would be promptly jailed, the offending monument removed, and the sod re-planted, while the citizenry howled for vengeance. Only one thing would arouse more public outrage and disgust: an announcement by our government that the illegal marker would stay in place.

Such a thing could not, of course, occur—not at that monument, anyway. But all war memorials are not created equal. On Sunday, June 25, 1876, five companies of the Seventh Cavalry under Brevet Major General George Armstrong Custer were annihilated by Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In 1881 a Vermont granite monument, bearing the names of 263 officers, soldiers, Indian scouts, and civilians who had died with Custer (or with surviving detachments under Major Marcus Reno and Captain

Frederick Benteen), was hauled in segments to the heart of Montana's Crow Indian country and erected atop "Last Stand" or "Custer Hill," where the bodies of Custer and some forty others had been found in positions indicating a last-ditch defense; in a grave surrounding the monument lie the bones of more than 200 soldiers. Dominating the hill and the white markers intended to show where each man fell, the weathered shaft is starkly impressive, sadly evocative of death.

On June 25, 1988, exactly one hundred and twelve years after Custer's death, Sioux "activist" Russell Means and an estimated forty followers entered the grounds of Custer Battlefield National Monument, along with others merely intent on observing "American Indian World Peace Day" (disconcertingly marked on the slaughter's anniversary). The ceremonies over, Means's flock (including whites with "Indian" style false braids affixed to their heads) began an illegal march, ostensibly to reach the Reno-Benteen Battlefield over four miles away, but soon returned to the Hill; there, after reading a letter from white clergymen apologizing for the last few Centuries of Dishonor, Means treated his followers and scattered tourists to a speech indicating that Indian oratory had deteriorated mark-

edly since the days of Chief Joseph.

"The whole thing is a lie. My heart bleeds when I think of people in that place," he said, pointing down to the visitor center and museum. For those swallowing the racist lie that at the battle the Indians had outnumbered the cavalry, Means (who had talked with unnamed Indian "elders") offered the truth: the cavalry had outnumbered the Indians. Did paleface archeologists affirm that hundreds of breechloading and repeating rifles were used against Custer? No problem:

The recent archeological dig is a lie, claiming that Custer was outgunned. Where would we get all these automatic [sic] weapons and then what did we do with them? Throw them away? They never tell you about the wagon train up in the hills. We also gave them a sensitivity training session too. Eighty percent of the soldiers shot themselves because they were drunk. We uncovered all the whiskey kegs that they brought along to party with.

One is reminded of film star Tim McCoy's comment that the best way to learn an Indian's history is to tell it to him. But Means's unusual battle reconstruction was a logical result of the theory that no Indian need crack a book to learn about his ancestors, and that impudent whites citing contemporary sources (as I once did in trying to con-

vince some Crow Indians that their ancestors wantonly slaughtered game) should be ignored. Unfortunately, Means neglected the "real story" deadpanned to battle buffs by Crows the previous year, proving that a wounded Custer had met death by suffocation at the hands—so to speak—of a large, vengeful Cheyenne woman sitting on his head.

The "Hitler monument"—and Custer—were Means's chief targets: "Can you imagine a monument listing the names of the SS, of Nazi officers, erected in Jerusalem?" Not surprisingly, he seemed unaware that it was over a century old: "Archeologists, anthropologists, and historians have produced a monument like that, a monument that was named for him, named for a mass murderer." While Means rambled, others produced shovels and began to dig into the mass grave. A blackish, 2½ ft. x 4 ft. steel plaque "emerged from the crowd" (as Park Superintendent Dennis Ditmanson later put it) and was hastily installed with bolts and quick-drying, water-doused cement. Crudely inscribed, apparently with a blowtorch, its legend ran: "In honor of our Indian Patriots who fought and defeated the U.S. calvary [sic] in order to save our women and children from mass-murder. In doing so, preserving rights to our

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Wayne Michael Sarf is the author of *God Bless You, Buffalo Bill: A Layman's Guide to History and the Western Film*.