



Thoughts from Linda:

## Our Endangered Values America's Moral Crisis

Jimmy Carter  
2005

This book review is being written in October of 2023, just as 39<sup>th</sup> President Jimmy Carter is celebrating his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday with his favorite peanut butter ice cream in Plains, Georgia, with his 96-year-old wife, Rosalynn.

The couple, married for 77 years, have broken all Presidential and marital longevity records. Both are technically in hospice at the moment, but as a longtime resident of Plains, Georgia, noted, "Never underestimate Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter." Donna Brazile, a former Democratic national chairperson, and presidential campaign manager who got her start on Carter's campaigns, said, "he's as good as they come and tough as they come too. If he were a tree, he'd be a towering, old Southern oak."

He wrote this book in 2005, as the United States was involved heavily in Iraq as the trial of Saddam Hussein was held during the second term of President George W. Bush. It was the year of Katrina, the death of Pope John Paul II, increased nuclear threats by North Korea, the launching of YouTube, the discovery of Eris, the most massive dwarf planet in the Solar System, and the Kyoto Accords.

The book was not a best-seller, but it has great significance in hindsight.

In this short book, President Carter calls out the key themes that represent the deterioration of our country's values and the potential impacts of these transformative shifts in America.

Just as the title indicates, he focuses on the core of America as defined by our values, especially those of human dignity and human rights. Brian Hall, the author of *Values Shift*, defines these values as:

*"Human Dignity*—Consciousness of the basic right of all human beings to have respect and to have their basic needs met so that each person has the opportunity to develop to full potential," and

*"Human Rights*--Committing personal talent, education, training, and resources to creating the means for all people in the world to experience their basic right to such life-giving resources as food, habitat, employment, health, and minimal practical education."

Certainly, with the benefit of his 99--mostly healthy years, he has been able to extend his life of service to become a global representative of these values, both through his work at The Carter Center and through his other many humanitarian activities. Two of his most noble achievements include his work to eradicate Guinea worm disease and river blindness and his decades of work with Habitat for Humanity, building houses for low-income people. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his commitment and actions to creating and preserving global human rights.

The book takes us through his own reflections as of 2005 on the state of governmental and cultural shifts, as he saw them, that he predicted would put America in a moral crisis in the future.

There are seventeen chapters, beginning with those that describe, in a very personal way, his own religious beliefs as a practicing Christian and how he has reconciled his own view of 'church and state' in common sense and practical ways. He then moves to several key topics that illustrate our

political system's corruption and fundamentalism's rise in all aspects of our lives, leading, he fears, to our ultimate demise as a moral and values-driven nation.

Chapters include *The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism, No Conflict Between Science and Religion, Fundamentalism in Government, The Distortion of American Foreign Policy, Attacking Terrorism, Not Human Rights? What Are the Major Threats to the Environment? and The World's Greatest Challenge in the New Millennium.*

I particularly appreciated his chapter that deals with our 'war on terrorism,' which took hold with the Patriot Act following the events of 9/11. At that time, President Carter opposed the movements in the US that broke the international laws laid out in the Geneva Convention and the many acts of torture our government committed during those days. He shares his thinking clearly in this chapter. He takes us inside many personal background conversations where he fiercely puts forth his own admonitions to leaders of our government about the faulty assumptions being made and the subsequent likely impacts of these actions.

He wrote another book, a novel, in 2003, for which he researched the Revolutionary War for six years. He noted, "One of my most shocking discoveries was that British officers, showing little concern for human rights, often ordered 'no quarter be granted' to Americans who surrendered on the battlefield. They were to be summarily executed. General Washington condemned the practice and announced a more enlightened approach to warfare."

He uses this and other examples to illustrate how courageous American leaders in the past have supported fundamental human values, even when the pressures are great to do the opposite, and in so doing, have established America as a great nation, one to be admired among others and deserving of the position of being an example for others to follow. And

he lays out the many mistakes he sees in the current atmosphere and actions taken that neither deserve accolades nor admiration.

In his concluding chapter, entitled *What is a Superpower?* He notes that Americans have always been justifiably proud of our country, starting with the bold Declaration of Independence's words, "that all men are created equal, that their Creator endows them with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

He goes on to note our military prowess today and the need to protect ourselves, but at the same time, acknowledges that "admirable characteristics of a nation are not defined by size and physical prowess." Instead, he says, "attributes include a demonstrable commitment to truth, justice, peace, freedom, humility, human rights, generosity and the upholding of other moral values."

The last chapter of his book is too lengthy for this review, but every American should read it. In it, he lays out a vision for our rebirth and re-commitment to the high standards that would genuinely describe a 'super-power.'

I am reminded why I voted for this capable and kind man back in 1976, when I so appreciated his military service in the Navy in WWII, his commitment to human rights, and his strong moral code, along with his executive experience both in the military and in his role as a Governor of Georgia.

History is re-evaluating the reputation of President Carter. For example, time has revealed his role as the lead negotiator of the release of our hostages in the Iran hostage situation, even though, at the time, Ronald Reagan was given the credit. History shows that this man exemplified the best of America, and indeed, the best of humanity, through his long life of service.

He dedicated this book as follows: "Dedicated to our children and grandchildren, for whom America's basic moral values must be preserved."

Let us hope this will be so. I highly recommend this book.