Jimmy Carter’s View of Truth

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Well, he’s back! In his “White House Diary,” Jimmy Carter engages in his latest attempt to burnish his historical reputation. His previous efforts, and there have been many, have earned him a dubious Nobel Peace Prize, but they have changed few minds here at home, because many Americans are old enough to remember him. Now, the ex-President begins his valedictory tour, something of a last hurrah, as it were, in the hopes of establishing a fraudulently positive historical legacy.

Mr. Carter’s latest book, “White House Diary,” published last month, nearly thirty years after he left office, is filled with old Carterite themes. He regularly insults Allies, referring to Margaret Thatcher as “overbearing” and slights his own Democratic Party mates like Ted Kennedy, as regular Townhall readers know from the Paul Kengor column last week. Carter also praises American enemies as his journal contains favorable references to the likes of Daniel Ortega, the Ayatollah Khomeni, Yasser Arafat and others.

The oldest Carter theme is also revisited here: The idea that the American voters chose the wrong man on November 4, 1980. Yes, St. James The Lesser still cannot come to terms with the fact that he suffered a good, old-fashioned whupping in the 1980 general election, and he has spent thirty years desperately attempting to re-write history, primarily by maligning the reputation of his vanquisher and successor, Ronald Reagan. Carter, displaying the mean streak for which he was known, began this campaign of denigration even before Reagan took the oath of office. He continued this backbiting for eight years, kept up throughout the 1990s, and on into the new millennium. The ex-President took time out to deliver a gracious eulogy at Reason’s state funeral in 2004, but now he has reverted to form. As Mr. Reagan said about Carter, in a slightly different context, “There you go again!”

The new diaries contain numerous slighting references and studied insults directed at the 40th President. Carter repeatedly plays the “Old Actor” card against Reagan, saying he simply memorized a few lines and repeated them over and over. The contemporary scholarship on Ronald Reagan shows this to have been patently false. We now know that Reagan wrote voluminously, if somewhat lightly, on a multitude of topics and that his preparation for the Presidency contained fifteen years of direct public life, more than Carter, himself. Carter also claims in the book that Reagan avoided having a series of debates in 1980, because this would show his “limited knowledge of the issues.” Mr. Carter conveniently omits the fact that he refused to take part in a debate sponsored by the League of Women Voters in September of 1980, ostensibly because they invited third-party candidate John Anderson to participate. Reagan and Anderson squared off in public contest, while Carter petulantly stayed at home. So, who really avoided debating whom?

The ex-President actually claims in his new book that the economy “was in relatively good shape” in 1980 and that unemployment, inflation, and most other historical yardsticks used to measure economic performance were good, by historical standard. He seems to be the only person who remembers it that way. In his commentaries within the diary, all of which have been written today, Carter makes no mention of the 80s prosperity, but tries to leave the impression that he turned over a nicely humming economy to President Reagan.

In the small matter of American victory in the Cold War, Mr. Carter, of course, extends no recognition to Ronald Reagan. He credits the “leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev...bringing about changes that would result in the fragmentation of the Soviet Union into Russia and about a dozen separate nations.” Carter continues by stating, incorrectly, “popular dissatisfaction resulted in the choice of a reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1988.” Actually, Gorbachev came to power in the late winter of 1985. The ex-President further comments, “...the Berlin Wall fell in November, 1989 and in 1990 the other Soviet Republics won...”
the right to hold their own elections and soon demanded independence from Moscow, a process completed on the last day of 1991.” The former President offers a pseudo-Hegelian interpretation of history as a “process”, thereby denying credit to Ronald Reagan, once again. Carter ignores the fact that many key Soviet figures admit that Reagan forced the Gorbachev reforms by accurately assessing the strength of the United States and the relative weakness of the Soviet Union. Carter also ignores the fact that Gorbachev admits that his reforms were intended to reinvigorate the USSR in order to continue a prosecution of the Cold War to a successful finish. Gorbachev did not propose to lose the Cold War, or to engage in “peaceful co-existence” with the USA. His reforms burgeoned out of control and, just as Reagan predicted, the Soviet leaders dismissed the possibility of a massive military effort to regain control of the situation. A reader of the Carter diary will find no mention of these historical facts.

Jimmy Carter’s enthusiasm for Mikhail Gorbachev does mask a certain lamentation in Carter’s life. He earnestly wishes that Gorby had come along in 1977-78. If that had happened, Carter believes, (and wants the public to believe) that we would have won the Cold War sooner, the Carter administration would have received credit, and Jimmy would have been re-elected in 1980. Everything else in Carter’s life and times pales in the reflection of his 1980 electoral Waterloo.

The 39th President of the United States always reverts to type. He is, and has always been, a proud, but petulant, and small-minded person. He is, once again, hitting the campaign trail in hopes of scrubbing away the tarnish from his legacy. He will go anywhere, fight any foe, pay any price, bear any burden, and bash any Reaganite in order to ensure the survival of a falsely positive legacy. It is quite sad to think that a former American President would sink so low. In the case of Jimmy Carter, however, it comes as no surprise.