

## LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

### JIMMY CARTER'S VISION FOR PEACE, PALESTINE & THE PLANET: A LEGACY UNDER ATTACK?

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LAURA FLANDERS: The United States' 39th President is now buried next to his wife, Rosalynn, on the grounds of their family home in Plains, Georgia, after lying in repose in Atlanta and DC and receiving a state funeral in the National Cathedral in Washington. Jimmy Carter was a hundred years old. I was a teenage peacenik when Carter was elected president in 1976 and impatient. Back then, I thought Carter hadn't done enough to stop nuclear proliferation or support national liberation movements and too much to perpetuate neoliberal economics and the Cold War. But when his death was announced, I decided to go down to Georgia to reassess. In reality, Carter's presidency had a lot more to it than I was aware of at the time, and his legacy is more relevant now than I could possibly have imagined. Here's a trailer from "[Carterland](#)," a documentary by Jim and Will Pattiz released in 2021.

- The story usually goes about President Carter. Well, he's a nice guy and a good person, great ex-president, but he's a failed president who was never really able to rise to the challenges of his time. That's what you hear. That's the story we've been told, but it's all wrong. Carter put all these questions on the table. Human rights, conservation and energy, our own culture of consumption. And every politician sees he was onto something.
- What he doesn't get credit for is just how much Carter accomplished in a single term. It's mind boggling. His legislative program was more successful than Bill Clinton's and Barack Obama's.
- It's really Jimmy Carter who says, "You know what? There is a tension between the lifestyles we live and the lifestyles we want to live in the future."
- Before you have Al Gore on climate change, you really had Jimmy Carter in a more pragmatic way, putting solar panels on the White House and talking about renewable energy.
- If Carter's policies had been adhered to, we wouldn't be having a climate crisis right now.
- This is not a message of happiness or reassurance, but it is the truth and it is a warning.

- It takes more strength to have humility when you have great power in your hands than it does to be a bully.

LAURA FLANDERS: From creating a national energy policy that married conservation with developing clean alternatives to fossil fuels, to passing the Superfund Act to make big polluters pay, to negotiating a treaty returning sovereignty over the Panama Canal to the Panamanian people gradually, and creating a federal department of education, Carter's accomplishments were many and his support has grown as I discovered when [I spoke to people](#) who turned out in their tens of thousands to pay their respects. Some had direct experience of the man and his policies, others simply felt nostalgia for a decent politician and a kinder time.

YANNA: My name's Yanna, and we come from Tampa to celebrate the life of President Jimmy Carter.

ARTHUR HUGHES: My name is Arthur Hughes.

CASEY BEAVERS: I'm Casey Beavers, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. Came from Nashville. And you can say I'm a big fan of Jimmy, but overall, just absolutely admire him, love him, adore him. My wife and I, we named our son after him.

YANNA: We were just talking about it two nights ago. I told her, "If we have kids, maybe Carter. That seems like a good name for a male or a female."

MELODY EISENBERG: I'm Melody Eisenberg, I live here in the Atlanta region. First president I voted for when I was 18.

CASEY BEAVERS: He was a champion of peace and humanity. That was his goal and he certainly achieved that in so many ways.

ARTHUR HUGHES: I would ask President Carter to do certain things, send a picture of himself to distinguish a veteran, and he would always do it. And I worked part-time at the Braves baseball, and he would always come to the game and I got a ball signed by, and he was just always himself.

YANNA: Because he was an amazing social activist, stood for civil justice, humanitarian efforts all over the world, you know, more than any other president has so far. And it was just important that we experience this moment to honor him.

LAURA: My name is Laura, also from Tampa. Honestly, I find it, you know, in such a divisive time in our country, just comforting.

MELODY EISENBERG: I was very proud to go cast my vote for him. He didn't win. But in those days, you just said, "Okay, well, that's the election," and you move on with it and you accept it. And, you know, I miss the days when elections were just, you know, respected.

GREG E. WADDLE: It's pretty moving, like it was full circle for me. I remember as a child seeing different historical events, and I remember the inauguration and I remember the hostage crisis, and I remember the peanut mug.

LAURA FLANDERS: As governor in 1973, Carter created a Georgia film office that helped to create an industry that's been ranked number one for the last several years. Greg E. Waddle is the president of [IATSE](#), the Motion Picture Studio Mechanics Union Local 479.

GREG E. WADDLE: You know, most people don't realize it, but he birthed and mentored the film industry here in Georgia. And my union that I'm the president of, we represent the studio mechanics in the entire film industry in the state in multiple crafts. When I joined, it was still sort of fledgling. It was about 195 members in 2000, and now we're up to 7,800. And it went from a small little economy to a large multi-billion dollar industry here in the state. And it's really all due to the team of people that President Jimmy Carter put together. And I'm very thankful for that.

RICHARD LI: About 15 years ago, I took my son and his friend to Jimmy Carter's home, and we had a great picture at his home in the backyard. Yeah, we had a great time together. Then In 2016, I had the opportunity to attend President Carter and his wife's 70th wedding anniversary.

LAURA FLANDERS: Richard Li was able to come to the US on a student visa thanks to Carter's establishment of diplomatic relations with China. Today, Lee is the vice president of the [Chinese American Business Association of Atlanta](#).

RICHARD LI: This year is the 45th anniversary of US-China relationship normalization. And over the past 40 years, he had the great policy to help the Chinese people, help China to develop, and that changed millions of people's life.

LAURA FLANDERS: Today, many of the most significant achievements of Carter's term are under attack, which gives you a sense of how significant they are. While campaigning for office, President Trump pledged to defund the Department of Education.

DONALD TRUMP: And I'm gonna close the Department of Education and move education back to the states, and we're gonna do it fast.

LAURA FLANDERS: As Carter's body was coming to the Capitol, [Trump was pledging](#) to take back the Panama Canal.

DONALD TRUMP: Look, the Panama Canal is vital to our country. It's being operated by China. China, and we gave the Panama Canal to Panama. We didn't give it to China, and they've abused it. They've abused that gift. It should have never been made, by the way. Giving the Panama Canal is why Jimmy Carter lost the election in my opinion, more so maybe than the hostages. The hostages were a big deal.

LAURA FLANDERS: In the four decades since leaving the White House, Jimmy Carter with his wife, Rosalynn, established the Carter Center to promote and expand human rights leading to his receiving a Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

JIMMY CARTER: I was asked to discuss here in Oslo the greatest challenges that the world faces. Among all the possible choices, I decided that the most serious and universal problem is a growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on earth. Ladies and gentlemen, war may sometimes be a necessary evil, but no matter how necessary, it is always evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children. The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears and prejudices. God gives us a capacity for choice. We can choose to alleviate suffering. We can choose to work together for peace. We can make these changes and we must.

LAURA FLANDERS: Carter built houses with the nonprofit housing organization, Habitat for Humanity, and wrote books and op-eds, speaking out on key issues. In 2002, he wrote an op-ed in the New York Times warning that right wing misinformation and violence was threatening US democracy and risking civil war. Carter also traveled extensively to conduct peace negotiations, monitor elections, and further the eradications of infectious diseases. Karin Ryan was with Carter on many of those trips. She's worked at the [Carter Center](#) since the early 1990s. Today she is the center's senior policy advisor on human rights and special representative on women and girls. I asked her what she thought uppermost on Carter's mind in his last years.

KARIN RYAN: Of course, we were waiting for the last Guinea worm to be eliminated. That was very important to him. And we're down to a few cases, a handful of cases. So eradicating Guinea worm was one of his life's missions. He was very concerned about the rights of women. You know, what was interesting about his approach to women's rights would be that he would hold, he wanted to hold men accountable for violence against women. So as a religious man, a

conservative religious man, he would say it's for men and male religious leaders in particular that misinterpret the scripture that are to blame for violence against women. And a panel discussion I had with him one time, we were talking about abortion, and he said, "Why did the women, why are the women left holding the bag?" He himself was opposed to abortion, okay? But he would say, "But what about male responsibility for an unwanted pregnancy?"

LAURA FLANDERS: No issue engaged Jimmy Carter more than the urgent question of Palestine, famous for negotiating the Camp David Accords while he was president, which brought peace between Israel and its closest military threat, Egypt. With the Carter Center, Carter was invited by the Palestinians to monitor several elections in 1996 when Arafat was elected president, along with the first Palestinian parliament after Arafat died. And again, in 2006 when Hamas ran for seats and won.

KARIN RYAN: The one issue that that really bedeviled him his whole adult life was the issue of the conflict between Israel and the larger Arab world, but also the Palestinians. And, you know, because of the Camp David agreement, he was so proud of that and he had every reason to be. It's the one most significant peace agreements in the Middle East that is still in place. In a meeting once with Israeli leaders, one of the staff members came up to him in tears and said, thanked him for saving his life and the life of his buddies because he had been stationed in the Sinai Peninsula during the Israeli Egyptian war. And so Camp David brought an end to that war where thousands, many thousands died.

LAURA FLANDERS: In the course of monitoring elections, Carter traveled throughout the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza and saw over decades the deterioration of conditions.

KARIN RYAN: He started to see the erection of this wall around Palestinian villages cutting people off from their land and creating separate roads for Israelis, for Jewish Israelis, for Jewish people, and Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. And he was so alarmed. I remember he went to, I think it was the Council of Foreign Relations in 2005, 2006, and gave this very kind of alarming, you know, raising the alarm. And everybody applauded politely and said, well, this is, we've gotta get on this and figure it out. But nothing changed.

LAURA FLANDERS: In 2006, Carter authored "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid," a book that drew harsh criticism.

KARIN RYAN: The Carter Center observed the 2006 elections, and which were called for by the United States and Israel permitted those elections. And in fact, the Prime Minister Sharon, actually approved the candidates that were, that ran in that election. So, but then when they won, this was not expected by the US or by Israel. And so Israel arrested those who won the election

and charged them with being members of a terrorist organization. So the election was not allowed to come to fruition and hold that movement, the Hamas political movement accountable through a system of democracy that would've, and President Carter saw that as the nonviolent solution that would lead to the unification of the Palestinian people under unified leadership and unified vision so that they could then negotiate with Israel as a united front to negotiate a permanent border between Israel and Palestine, with Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, which is one of the core issues. So he saw that as one of the key ways to avoid the violence. That was in 2006. So of course, that was 18 years ago. When he saw that, when Israel and the US actually responded by instead on not accepting, not allowing those election results to be honored or for the Palestinian legislature to be seated, they never allowed that. So this created a conflict, of course, which has now escalated. And so he was so agitated that there had been no serious peace talks, and that it became evident to him that the Israelis had no intention really of allowing a fully sovereign Palestinian state to be formed. He decided to write a book that would get people's attention. And so he went on a book tour. He was absolutely vilified. He was criticized, he was accused of being antisemitic, which, you know, imagine the president who removed Israel's largest enemy from the battlefield, Egypt, could be considered antisemitic is so beyond the pale. He was so committed to Israel's security, which he knew could only happen when the Palestinian people would have their state. So this is why he used the word apartheid because he saw it with his eyes. There were segregated communities, villages surrounded by a wall. People couldn't access their land. Jewish settlers would have total freedom of movement in Palestinian territory, yet Palestinians couldn't access it. So he decided to call it what it was and to warn, he really did it to warn the world to say, "If we don't solve this, it will explode."

LAURA FLANDERS: Was President Carter aware as he lay in hospice care of the Hamas attacks on Israel of October 7th, 2023 the overwhelming Israeli assault and the world's highest court's accusations of genocide?

KARIN RYAN: I was not able to speak with him after October 7th. He has been in hospice care and only the family and his caregivers were communicating with him. So, yeah, and you know, but I can imagine, I understand that he was watching the news and it must have been very distressing for him. I can only imagine how distressing it was for him to see.

LAURA FLANDERS: What's the future of the Carter legacy? Many of his admonitions seem more timely now than ever.

JIMMY CARTER: In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our

longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives, which have no confidence or purpose.

KARIN RYAN: When you are the United States, you have so much power. And he knew that. And he knew that we could do, we could actually bring the world into a state of peace, into a state of prosperity for all nations into real progress. He didn't wait 'til he was out of office to raise the moral questions, right? He talked about climate change when he was in the White House. He preserved the Arctic refuge. He didn't want to expand oil drilling. His goal was, you know, he ensured his energy. If you read his energy legislation, it was all about renewables. So this is the thing that, this is what is so incredible about his life is that he was practical, but he brought a vision of American power that was a different vision of American power. I think it's so important for fellow Americans to really recognize that these two, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were really sort of like a conscience of the nation. And they would point out things that had to be resolved. They loved this country. It was not out of any kind of animus. It was out of love. It was out of love that they criticized this country. People would ask him, "What do you think? What do you hope for this country?" And he would say, "I wish the United States could be the most generous, use our power, our economic power, even our military power in the correct ways." Like he, who's a Navy man, and he served in the Navy, so he believed in the military for self-defense only. So his idea was the United States should be the most generous, the most truth and justice seeking, committed to human rights. We should absolutely make that a priority because that's how the world will be safe. That's how the world will be at peace. That's how the world will prosper and make progress if every people can pursue their dreams for their own countries with in peace.

LAURA FLANDERS: And the future for the Carter Center? Again, Karin Ryan.

KARIN RYAN: Well, there is no other institution like the Carter Center in the United States. We recently had a human rights defenders forum where activists from all over the world came to the Carter Center and they told us that they would not have traveled to an American organization if it wasn't the Carter Center to attend a human rights conference. Because the United States has not been fulfilling, living up to its human rights obligations. And this is well known around the world. We don't talk about it very much here in the United States. We don't know that. Our fellow Americans are not really as aware that, of the United States. And President Carter wrote about this, by the way, and would speak out. He talked about closing Guantanamo and ending the war on terror and he opposed the US invasion of Iraq. So Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center have always been in the, sort of the lead of calling out important issues and holding the United States accountable for human rights standards. So I believe that that would be the most appropriate legacy for the Carter Center.

LAURA FLANDERS: A failed presidency? Well, you tell me. My teenage self wasn't entirely wrong. Jimmy Carter did back the backers of death squads in El Salvador for too long and send

non-lethal aid to Islamist fighters in Afghanistan in a way that evolved gradually into the Al-Qaeda we know today. He deregulated banks and businesses and handled inflation in a way that increased profits and drove down wages. He also invested in a deadly new generation of nimble nuclear missile carriers, MX and Crews. What also happened though was Carter put peace on the map and the preciousness of the planet. And he warned us what would happen if we didn't address those. In the end, we're told the nation took a turn, decided against the Carter regime, and embraced Ronald Reagan and a turn to the right. Now we know that in fact, although Carter was held responsible for the failure to release US hostages held in Iran, actually the Reagan administration, the Reagan campaign, had its emissaries in the region telling anyone and everyone who could influence the outcome that they might just see arms deals from Reagan if they could delay that release until inauguration day. That's what happened. The press that told the story were largely silenced, and many others in the media kept their silence for years. These phenomena are still with us. Hostages, backroom deals, manipulation, lies. What Carter reminds us with his long life after the presidency is how the story of this country is not written yet and the best just still might be ahead. We could still make different choices as a nation, but will we? For "Laura Flanders & Friends," I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us. 'Til the next time. Stay kind, stay curious, and if you want the full uncut version of our show, subscribe to our free podcast. All the information's at the website.

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