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THE RHETORIC OF JIMMY CARTER: RENEWING AMERICA'S CONFIDENCE IN
CIVIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH SPEECH AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Christopher M. Bondi

December 2020

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Christopher M. Bondi

2020

THE RHETORIC OF JIMMY CARTER: RENEWING AMERICA’S CONFIDENCE IN
CIVIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH SPEECH AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

THE RHETORIC OF JIMMY CARTER: RENEWING AMERICA’S CONFIDENCE IN CIVIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH SPEECH AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

By

Christopher M. Bondi

December 2020

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Craig T. Maier, PhD

July 15, 2019 marked the fortieth anniversary of President Jimmy Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” speech, a catalyst for what became an often overlooked yet significant turning point in the nation’s history. Carter’s words were both poignant and pointed as he calmly, yet directly, addressed the nation’s dependence on fossil fuels and engagement in narcissistic practices that led to a coveting of material goods. In an examination of the events that shaped this historical moment, this dissertation contends that, despite President Carter’s attempt to steer America in a more environmentally and socially conscious direction, the nation instead acquiesced to Ronald Reagan’s rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Carter’s rhetoric, his ethos, and his leadership during the crisis provide exemplars for how we might navigate our current crisis of higher education within communication and the humanities. In Carter, we can find a glimmer of hope that

we might restore our confidence in civic leadership, public speaking, and political education, and influence college and university students to engage in meaningful, ethical work inside the political theater.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to our nation's 49th President, Jimmy Carter, for his confidence in American civic traditions, and for his ceaseless work on behalf of peace and human dignity throughout the world. The integrity and honesty with which he led can, hopefully, inspire educators and other civic leaders to follow his path.

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Chapter 1: The “Crisis of Confidence” Speech—A Rhetorical Crossroads

Introduction

July 15, 2019 marked the fortieth anniversary of President Jimmy Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” speech, arguably one of the most overlooked, yet significant American presidential address of the latter twentieth-century. On that Sunday evening, the millions of viewers who tuned in witnessed one of the strongest showings (if not *the* strongest showing) of presidential leadership that Carter had provided throughout his tenure.

Ragsdale (1987) suggests, “As speechmakers, American presidents portray themselves as leaders of *the* people” (p. 704). Further, presidents who are effective speechmakers can influence or change the attitudes of the nation by way of their communications (Ragsdale, 1987). Jimmy Carter effectively did both, to which his 17-percent increase in approval ratings would attest (Eizenstat, 2018). However, contrary opinions about the speech’s effectiveness certainly exist. Such opinions have proven so strong, in fact, that Carter’s speech has, for decades, been unfairly labeled “The Malaise Speech.” In actuality, the thirty-ninth president successfully rallied the nation to the cause of fighting and defeating an energy crisis which had plagued America for the better part of the 1970s.

Carter’s words were both poignant and pointed as he addressed the nation’s dependence on fossil fuels and the practice of its citizens to seek comfort in luxury. However, the American people promptly voted Carter out of office in 1980, thus ushering in the Reagan era, as well as a continuation of the practices that Christopher Lasch (1979) described in his work, *The Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch argued that Americans, constantly anxious and disgruntled, engage in quests for personal pleasure and affirmation. Our consumption of products and pursuit of leisure activities is stimulated by

a barrage of advertising messages that are funneled through the media and presented to us as instant cures for what ails our lives. Yet, this only leads to greater anxiety and comparisons, as we question whether our lives measure up to others. The loss of traditions and community follows suit as we are left only beholden to ourselves, bereft of any appetite for personal salvation.

In *Overcoming America/America Overcoming: can we survive modernity*, Stephen Rowe (2012) insists that, today, much of the nation has been “eclipsed” by modernity, a moment created by and shared by all societies on the planet (p. 4). He advocates that America must acknowledge the value of its traditions while also retaining the valuable elements of modernity and globalization (Rowe, 2012). Determining which elements to retain would, most likely, require more research and more shared discussion. Through this, though, perhaps the milieu of the 1970s that Lasch critiqued may possibly be overcome and a new age with ethics and narrative at its forefront may be realized. With this in mind, Rowe (2012) offers us hope for the nation’s future, suggesting, “America should not be underestimated. The genius of America is overcoming” (p. 3). However, he also offers a caveat, a new hurdle for America to jump—that American needs now to overcome itself (Rowe, 2012).

This certainly creates a challenging conundrum for future generations to solve. The events surrounding the 1970s Energy Crisis formed a crossroads in American society, the ripple effects of which are still felt today. Now, scientific and academic experts warn that, by failing to successfully navigate our shifting sources of consumption and acknowledge the threat that human energy abuse has on our environment, we will be in the midst of a global crisis (Victor and Yueh, 2010). Signs have pointed to this during

the past fifteen years. One can look to BP's involvement in the Deepwater Horizon explosion, its responsibility for a 2005 Texas oil well explosion, and its subsequent environmental incidents involving Alaskan oil wells for evidence (Swann, 2014). Abuses to the environment such as these and their connection to modernity's characteristic emphasis on the individual begs the question whether America is capable of overcoming itself in the twenty-first century and beyond (Rowe, 2012).

Signs of this were present during the 1970s. For Lasch, and subsequently Carter, a culture of narcissism had enveloped American society by the middle of the decade, compelling Carter to engage it rhetorically in 1979. Scholars in recent years suggest that the resultant "Crisis of Confidence" speech was a turning point in American history, in which Carter's call for humility and social responsibility was drowned out by Ronald Reagan's "celebratory nationalism" (Mattson, 2009a, p. 16). Forming an entryway into a discussion of the significance and relevance of the speech today are two questions: 1) Was Carter right about America all along when he referred to it as "the most wasteful nation on earth" (source), and 2) If he *was* right, why did the nation fail to listen? These are two questions that will be examined in subsequent chapters throughout this dissertation.

The Significance of the "Crisis of Confidence" Speech for Communication Studies

Presidential rhetoric is essential to our understanding of how speech and history converge. It is also fundamental to understanding the administrative branch of American government and, by extension, the legislative and judicial branches. At least theoretically, a president acts as a guiding compass for the nation and speaks for the people. Thus, the words spoken in presidential addresses transforms historical events into historical

moments. Every president helps shape America (for good or for bad) by “deeds done in words” (Campbell and Jamieson, 1990, p. 11). Regardless of who that individual is, whether Democrat or Republican, once a president speaks to the nation the words spoken are woven into nation’s fabric (Campbell and Jamieson, 1990). Therefore, it is wise to study the speeches of presidents and, in this particular case, the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, to gain a sense of how a president’s words reflect and signify his leadership. Through a study of leadership, new leaders may emerge, and we may gain a better understanding of our tendencies toward leaders in the process.

If an Aristotelian approach to political leadership is taken, then “truth” would, most likely, be the virtue through which ideal leadership is best manifested. In *Truth and Political Leadership*, Theodore R. Weber (1989) writes, “A consideration of the experience of political leaders, of what they actually encounter in practice, reinforces the claim that political leadership must deal inescapably with considerations of truth” (p. 5). When referring to the United States’ political system, Weber insists that our political processes and decision-making ideals are based largely on trust. Trust depends on truthfulness. In examining the presidency of Jimmy Carter, we can see a leader ethically bound to remain honest with the people. Honesty in leadership has, arguably, eroded. Some may argue that completely honest leaders have never even existed. Still, a study of Carter is essential to studying leadership as a whole. That Carter considered how each of his decisions would affect the American people at the expense of special interests, suggests a presidential ethic that serves as an important example in the area of communication ethics as a whole.

Leaders must be guided by ethics and must communicate *ethically*. Otherwise, a nation's people will remain rudderless and bound solely to their emotivism (MacIntyre, 2007). MacIntyre defined emotivism as “the doctrine that moral evaluation is purely a matter of personal preference,” and he argued that this new doctrine flourished during the “agency-dominated twentieth-century” (2007; Roberts, 2003). During this historical moment, emotivism undermined our devotion to narrative structure, as previously accepted narratives of unity—church, family, and nation—disintegrated and were replaced by our personal preferences (Roberts, 2003). As a result, our interpersonal communication has suffered and our attitude toward our leaders has grown cynical, “as we operate from individualistic desires and anticipate that others will do the same” (Roberts, 2003, p. 197; Arnett & Arneson, 1999). Thus, MacIntyre (1966) questioned whether it is up to us to choose our own set of morals, or whether the nature of the universe sets limits on the morals we may choose.

Arguably, without a compass to check our emotivism, without sound, ethical communicative leadership, humans will “stand outside of both nature and reason,” and use their freedom to, inevitably, destroy themselves (Neibuhr, 1961, pp. 14-16). Carter was wise to this notion, and his words sought to persuade the American people of it. He knew that if we maintained our narcissistic and wasteful practices, often in conjunction with the practices of the market, we would reach the point whereby larger-scale environmental disasters and crises would cause greater confusion in the way we shape our cultures, beliefs, lives, and institutions in future moments (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016). Further, by placing so much of our trust in the market, we begin to “conflate the distinction between democracy and capitalism, to see corporate power as virtually the

same as American power” (Rowe, 2012, p. 23). Corporations will feed on this mindset, thereby increasing bureaucracy through money managers and measures of planning, effectiveness, systems integration, and productivity, all of which are intended to gain a competitive edge (Rowe, 2012). Communication ethics offers us a check on these practices, providing us with a compass to navigate our futures.

Which brings us to the point of this dissertation. Despite President Carter’s attempt to steer America toward a more environmentally and socially conscious future, the nation acquiesced to Ronald Reagan’s rhetoric of American exceptionalism. This parallels today’s historical moment, whereby the nation stands at another ethical crossroads, faced with a choice between the rhetoric of narcissism and the rhetoric of conscience. Therefore, Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” speech will be revisited and studied, both the content of the speech itself and its context within its historical moment. Additionally, four areas to which the content and style of the speech connects will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters: 1) Carter’s intellectual biography, 2) the scholarly influences, the crafting of, and the delivery of the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, 3) the reactions to and implications of the speech, and 4) the topic’s overall connection to the field of communication. The remainder of this chapter will establish the backstory of the speech, focusing on Carter’s ascension to the presidency and the ensuing economic dilemmas that his administration faced and attempted to solve. It will then delve into his ethos and rationale for the policy decisions that he made, as well as the nation’s response. Lastly, the chapter will focus on Carter’s legacy and where the nation stands today in the aftermath of the energy crisis and Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” speech.

Carter's Election and the Lead-Up to the Crisis of Confidence

In an article titled, "Electing Ourselves in 1976: Jimmy Carter and The American Faith," Christopher Lyle Johnstone (1978) suggests that within the issues and themes of presidential campaigns are the clues to the "anxieties, desires, needs, and aspirations of the American people" (p. 242). When examining the 1976 presidential campaign of Jimmy Carter, it becomes clear that he successfully persuaded an anxious and cynical public to have faith in their country and in themselves once again (Johnstone, 1978). By voting for Carter, Americans could hope to recapture faith in their tarnished political system, one that had failed them during the Nixon and Ford administrations (Johnstone, 1978).

During his first 100 days, Carter started the process of charting "the future of policy where Ford and the conservatives had left off" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 157). However, the nation's attitude towards energy undermined Carter's political effectiveness. Popular opinion held that America had passed through the minefield of the 1973 embargo and that the energy crisis had ended (Horowitz, 2005). Still, Carter pressed the issue, making energy his top domestic priority on his first day in office. This choice established a pattern of taking on politically unpopular issues because he believed it was the right thing to do (Eizenstat, 2018). Ultimately, and unfortunately, the pattern would doom his presidency.

Facing an uphill battle, Carter called for "a comprehensive plan to revolutionize all aspects of [energy] price and use" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 137). By the mid-1970s, "natural gas provided roughly one-third of all energy needs" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 162). Much of the need was in the north, while most of the production came from the south

(Jacobs, 2017). The geographical imbalance gave southern oil producers hope that Carter might do away with natural gas controls so that supplies could more easily reach northern areas of the country (Jacobs, 2017). Such a result would alleviate finger pointing and assertions by the public that the companies had perpetrated a fake crisis in order to increase their revenues (Richman, 1979).

The public's lingering bias against both the oil companies and the government placed a speedbump in the way of big oil's agenda and the Carter administration's policies. By the mid-1970s, the public generally believed that America would end its dependence on foreign oil through alternative energy sources, namely coal, nuclear, and solar power (Richman, 1979). Coal was expected to become the nation's leading energy source by the early 1980s and nuclear energy thereafter. However, an accident at Three Mile Island's nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania turned the nation against nuclear energy after hundreds of thousands of gallons of radioactive water flowed into local rivers (Horowitz, 2005).

This incident only reinforced Carter's belief in a less dangerous approach to national fuel consumption. Carter "blamed the country's careless consumer habits for energy shortages" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 174). Of course, neither the American people nor the media were moved by the president's assertions. Perhaps as a result, the country's response to Carter's energy policy proposal was lukewarm at best. The plan called for price increases on energy as well as raises in gasoline prices through taxes, resulting in a "legislative battle [that divided] the party, pitting producers in the South against consumers in the North and also setting environmentalists against New Deal liberals" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 175). Republicans criticized Carter's energy plan for two reasons: 1) it

relied heavily on government control, and 2) it assumed a pessimistic view of the future (Jacobs, 2017).

Through it all, the Carter administration was failing in its attempts to curb America's appetite for energy use or find a solution that would quell the country's reliance on foreign oil (Jacobs, 2017). Carter's messages with regard to the matter were perceived as scolding rather than supporting, pessimistic rather than hopeful. (Eizenstat, 2018). People wanted abundant energy at reasonable prices rather than a critique of how materialistic and self-indulgent they had become (Horowitz, 2005). In effect, Carter's rhetorical messages were having the opposite effect on the nation than what had been intended. He was delivering tough messages that people did not want to hear, even if the nation needed to hear them (Eizenstat, 2018).

The situation only worsened during the Iranian Revolution in late 1978, which led to the second oil shock in less than a decade. Inflation rose to more than 12 percent and gasoline prices increased by 55 percent during the first half of the year (Horowitz, 2005). As the crisis expanded, gasoline distributors limited their purchase amounts. Before too long, the majority of the nation's gasoline service stations ran out of sufficient supplies due to greater customer demand brought about by the effects of post-World War II's urban sprawl. Immediately prior to Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech, roughly 90 percent of all gasoline stations in the New York metropolitan area were closed (Horowitz, 2005). Christian Long (2011) provides a stunning visual of how the crisis affected consumers, suggesting that gasoline stations in the country looked like a totem line of cars at the pump as impatient customers sometimes waited hours to refill their vehicles. This new turn of events only further spotlighted the stalled political momentum and

troubled economy that began to develop during the Johnson administration. These combined forces had, for many Americans, created a crisis of confidence in their future (Horowitz, 2005).

Realizing the nation's need for leadership during this difficult time, Carter felt compelled to address the people directly. Prior to doing so, he retreated to Camp David for 10 days to discuss the situation and the mindset of the people. During this interval, Carter consulted with numerous intellectuals, including Christopher Lasch, Robert Bellah, and Daniel Bell (Mattson, 2009b). As chronicled in a *Washington Post* article, written by Richard Cohen and dated July 19, 1979:

It was May 30 that Carter had given a dinner party. The guest list was small and select. The president was there and his wife Rosalynn. . . . Also present were Pat Caddell, the president's pollster; Christopher Lasch, historian and author; Daniel Bell, a sociologist and coeditor of the magazine, *The Public Interest*. . . . Some of those who attended that White House dinner have emerged as particularly influential with the president. [One] was Lasch, the author of *The Culture of Narcissism*, a book, one person said, 'you see around the White House.' . . . Another academic said to be influential is Robert N. Bellah, a University of California sociologist whose article, "Human Conditions for a Good Society," caught the eye of White House staffers when it was printed in *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*. Bellah has [also] been to Camp David. (pars. 3-6).

The resultant address that Carter delivered to the nation was, in Blake's (2010) words, "a rare moment of seriousness in our recent political history" (p. 21). While people and media pundits with varied personal, moral, and political perspectives interpreted the

speech in a variety of ways, Carter's approval ratings improved for several days thereafter and hope was rekindled (Horowitz, 2005). Soon, however, the nation turned against him. Mattson (2009b) remarks that it remains a historical mystery how Carter's words "received immediate applause and yet wound up ensuring his defeat" in the subsequent election of 1980 (p. 9). Perhaps Carter's attempts to solve the crisis were upstaged by the advent of the Reagan's rhetorical moment. Yet, what may have also conspired to usher Carter out of office was the nation's waning concern for historical continuity and a decline in its awareness that it belonged to a succession of generations that stretched into the future (Lasch, 1979).

Additionally, a decrease in civic participation and an increasing reliance on experts and bureaucracies emerged. In other words, the people wanted an external fix, something or someone to come along and make everything better. In the election of 1980, the people supposedly got what they wanted. Yet, Eisenstat (2018) asserts, "When a nation and its leaders cannot face up to the truth about their challenges and look instead for scapegoats, it is difficult to develop sensible policies" (p. 139). Indeed, laying the groundwork for Reagan's entrance as the anti-Carter was the American public's search for a scapegoat (Carter) to blame for its problems rather than its willingness to look inward at itself and realize that it helped create the problem.

The Energy Crisis Resolution—Blame Narrative

Beginning with the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the nation had experienced a wave of social and political letdowns including a war in Vietnam, a period of economic stagnation, and an exhaustion of its natural resources. The cumulative effect of these problems soured the mood of the American people, and their emerging

pessimism was aimed at the nation's subsequent leaders—Johnson, Nixon, and Ford—and coincided with a loss of civic traditions (Lasch, 1979). When Carter took office, his ability to provide effective presidential leadership had already been undermined by the events of the previous decade. Granted, Carter made the rough political waters even more difficult to navigate by refusing to compromise with the Democratic Party on various issues and by remaining politically tone-deaf when faced with conflicting positions within his administration (Horowitz, 2005). What helped seal his fate were his post-“Crisis of Confidence” speech actions, which alienated both his party and his administration even further (Jacobs, 2017), giving credence to the notion that Carter, while noble in his intent to quell the crisis, approached it in a flawed fashion.

In an attempt to utilize new energy sources such as solar power, in which he believed strongly, Carter called for the creation of an energy security corporation to stimulate synthetic fuel production. He also attempted to persuade utility companies to switch from oil to coal production (Jacobs, 2017). As for natural gas, Jacobs writes that Carter “chose to continue with the gradual decontrol of oil prices” (2017, p. 229). However, all of these measures did little to stimulate assurance for either the American public or the conservatives that a new energy independence was on the horizon. As the crisis continued, the government, the environmentalists, and the American people blamed Carter for the situation.

Criticism came from all sides, even from those who, ironically, might have benefited from Carter's initiatives. His insistence on developing synthetic fuels angered environmentalists who claimed that doing so would “roll back much of the progress in environmental regulation and lead to an increase in carbon dioxide pollution” (Jacobs,

2017, p. 236). The Congressional Black Caucus withdrew support for him, insinuating that the president had cut back on domestic programs designed to help African Americans (Jacobs, 2017). Labor groups, such as the United Automobile Workers, demanded Carter re-impose price controls on oil (Jacobs, 2017). Other members of government on both the right and the left continued to batter Carter for what was perceived as his inability to address and properly solve the practical economic problems that were hurting the nation. It would appear as though few Americans (both civilian and those in political office) took to heart Carter's argument that "all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America," (Carter, 1979). Due to the nation's wastefulness regarding energy, peoples' desire to live more affluent lifestyles, and their goal to live increasingly more for themselves and for the moment rather than for future generations, they partially shared responsibility for the crisis (Lasch, 1979).

Deep into 1979 and early into 1980, the country was engaged in finger-pointing all around. Various narratives eventually emerged from the central crisis and were spotlighted by the media and debated in the court of public opinion (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016). The common denominator among most, if not all, of these narratives was Carter who eventually emerged as the central blame figure of the energy crisis. The president had attempted to respond by publicly acknowledging the attacks with an informative and persuasive narrative of self-defense (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016). This narrative was embedded within the rhetoric of his "Crisis of Confidence" speech, which had attempted to transcend the energy problem by linking it with a greater problem that was plaguing American society (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016).

However, despite a reasonably high level of praise for his commitment to the problem, the increase of blame and ridicule aimed at Carter deflated his rhetorical message, especially following an ill-advised reshuffling of his cabinet only days after the speech (Horowitz, 2005). The media piled on, only adding to the narrative that Carter, as president, was out of his league. *The Wall Street Journal* pushed the opinions of many corporate leaders, insisting that Carter relied too heavily on big government; *The National Review* compared Carter to an evangelical preacher whose words and actions are contradictory; *The Los Angeles Times* also chided Carter for taking on the role of preacher rather than a president (Horowitz, 2005). Eventually, the final straw for Carter's detractors was the Iran Hostage Crisis, which paved the way for the election of Ronald Reagan as the 40th president of the United States.

Strangely, after a nearly a decade of unrest, the energy crisis of the 1970s came to an end with the calm scribble of a pen. On January 28, 1981, Reagan signed an executive order that ended price controls, effectively setting the stage for a fundamental shift in energy policy (Jacobs, 2017). From that point on, he would continue to pivot away from Carter's previous economic positions, introducing and signing legislation that proved philosophically different from his predecessor's. For Reagan, American power and dominance was nothing to be ashamed of (Hill, 2015). His administration embodied an "exemplar strand" of American exceptionalism that pursued a more isolationist policy while still advocating an imperialist military (McCloskey, 2018, p. 46). This contradicted Carter's focus on the environment and human rights, which had been the cornerstone of his presidency (Balmer, 2014).

The Reagan administration also began chipping away at Carter's attempts to curtail energy consumption by allowing companies to avoid tougher clean air laws and by delaying both the implementation of auto emission standards and the adoption of alternative energy sources (Jacobs, 2017). The last act, which opened the floodgates of the free market, was Reagan's 30% tax cut; it was "the greatest single departure in public policy since Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 276). The corporations fed off of this, and the American people felt emboldened and free, thanks to Reagan's laissez faire style of leadership. Conservation and sacrifice, respect for the past and the future, and consideration for people less fortunate fell by the wayside, replaced with the belief that "greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works" (Stone, 1987). By freeing the market and deregulating the energy industry, Reagan's initiatives had seemingly solved the energy crisis, but some Americans were "already suffering from buyer's remorse, worried about the new president's saber rattling, his proposals to elevate defense spending, his tax schemes benefiting the affluent, and his disregard for women's rights" (Balmer, 2014, p. 152). Reagan's actions gave birth to a historical moment that featured increased militarization abroad and unchecked corporations left to their own agendas, all supported by a president who was less concerned about the country's consumption of energy resources and more concerned with free markets and American military interests (Jacobs, 2017).

Perhaps one defining sign of the times was Sammy Hagar's 1984 hit song "I Can't Drive 55," which poked fun at the previous administration and celebrated the fact that "driving slow and conserving energy were a thing of the past" (Jacobs, 2017). With Reagan now the star of America's new hero narrative (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016), the

American people had what they wanted—the ability to consume, to waste, and, ultimately, to engage in therapeutic practices that fed the individual’s sense of instant gratification. Inevitably, these narcissistic tendencies paved the way for an emergence of a culture of Americans who depend upon therapeutic self-help models and the acquisition of wealth and material goods for validation of their self-esteem (Lasch, 1979).

Meanwhile, Carter’s warnings about narcissism and consumption went largely unheeded, essentially dismissed by Reagan’s singular vision of American exceptionalism that framed the nation as the leading force for good in the world. Also, largely dismissed was the legacy of the Carter presidency, a legacy of important accomplishments and an unwavering commitment to the ethical future of humanity.

The Legacy of the Carter Years

Americans belonging to Generation X and, perhaps, even those belonging to subsequent generations through the present day, are aware of a political and historical metanarrative that identifies former president Jimmy Carter as an indecisive leader and, ultimately, a failed president. Contributing to the narrative has been the lasting image of the 40th president of the United States, Ronald Reagan, as a “spectacle character [who] projected potency” (Miroff, 2014, p. 237). Reagan took office during a period of high national anxiety, and he managed to reassure the American people that their best years were still ahead of them (Miroff, 2014). While Wall Street and many large corporations prospered financially, the legacy of the Carter presidency gradually diminished and his rhetorical moment became coined by the expression “the malaise days.” The very word “malaise” connotes weakness, another term subsequently applied to Carter and his administration (Wirthlin, 1994, pp. 394-395).

An alternate perspective argued for here is that the popular metanarrative of the Carter presidency omits several of his key contributions to the country, as well as his commitment to the welfare of the nation and, by extent, the world. (Eizenstat, 2018). His alignment with the minds of Neibuhr, Lasch, Bellah, and De Tocqueville indicates a deeply philosophical public servant who disdained materialism, considering it a “dangerous disease of the human mind” (De Tocqueville, 2005, p. 63). During his four years in office, Carter considered it a moral obligation to steer America in a more ethical direction regarding materialism as it pertained to the environment, world peace, and human rights.

Even following his election defeat to Ronald Reagan in 1980, he remained consistent in his messages of humility and honor, conveyed succinctly after he left office: “If I am my brother’s keeper, it’s not enough for me to learn about or even pray about his troubles. I’m called upon to act on his behalf, even when that requires fighting injustice and tyranny” (Carter, 1997, p. 126). Carter’s commitment to his fellow human beings aligns with Emmanuel Levinas’ call to acknowledge the face of the Other (Arnett, 2017). His spirituality, always present throughout his life, influenced his tenure in office, not to mention his post-presidency. He followed De Tocqueville’s assertion that the mission of legislators and leaders of democracies is to raise up the souls of their fellow citizens (2005, p. 63). So, where did the Carter presidency go wrong? Thinking critically, one must attempt to determine to what extent Carter failed the American people, but also to what extent the American people failed him.

Carter’s presidential legacy has undergone a transformation in recent years. His initiatives and accomplishments during his tenure are now being acknowledged, and the

economic and societal dilemmas that he faced during his historical moment are seen as contributing factors to his administration's shortcomings. Carter's former senior domestic advisor, Stuart Eizenstat (2018), contends that despite the conventional wisdom that Jimmy Carter was a "weak and hapless president," his single term in office was one of the most consequential in American history (p. 3). While his critics largely accused him of indecisiveness, his supporters insisted that, if anything, "he was too bold and determined in attacking too many challenges that other presidents had sidestepped or ignored" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 3). Carter was a people-first president, "deeply committed to fulfilling his campaign promises" (Carter, 1982, p. 87). Part of his attractiveness as a candidate during the 1976 election cycle was his relative newness to the political scene by virtue of having only served one term in the state senate (1963-1967) and four years as governor of Georgia (1971-1975). He successfully framed himself as an outsider who promised Americans that he would restore respectability to the White House.

Many an "outsider" has been elected president throughout the nation's history. In the case of Carter, however, it was his determination to remain an outsider that cost him politically, particularly when negotiating policies with the Washington establishment. As stated by Franklyn Haiman (2000), "Leaders, in order to be accepted and trusted by their followers, must conform to their basic values—be 'one of them' and not viewed as outsiders" (p. 359). Carter fought against this idea. He struggled throughout the early days of his presidency to avoid capture by the Washington political establishment while fighting for the common good, and his stubbornness in avoiding compromise caused him to pay a great political price in the long run.

Arguably, Carter could have led the establishment and used it to achieve his goals rather than resisting it (Hess, 1992). Eizenstat writes: “[Hamilton] Jordan, who knew him best, said that ‘neither he nor we in his entourage were emotionally prepared for the role of the establishment candidate, where at a minimum it is essential to look at the political consequences before making a leap of conscience’” (Jordan, 1992/Eizenstat, 2018, p. 55). From this, it can be inferred that Carter was not a man who failed to lead. Rather, he failed to successfully play the role of politician, which all presidents must do, at least, to some extent. He chose instead to be a pariah, to remain “outside the system and function knowingly as an outsider” (Arnett, 2013, p. 26). For Carter, politics and leadership were mutually exclusive (Eizenstat, 2018). He saw himself as a president, first and foremost. Politics, to him, was secondary. However, his attempts to remain an outsider and govern without getting his hands muddied in the waters of the political elite may have cost him a second term.

Still, Carter’s lone tenure in office embodies the idea that a person’s reach should be farther than his grasp. While it is perhaps true that Carter was not blessed with the leadership skills that other presidents, both past and present, had made their trademark—John F. Kennedy’s grace, Ronald Reagan’s clarity and purpose, Bill Clinton’s political skills, or Barack Obama’s eloquence—he brought to the office “his own unique intellect, self-discipline, political courage, resiliency, and, especially an integrity that set him apart from many presidents before and after” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 84). It is this integrity that, arguably, is sorely lacking from today’s leaders, and what makes an examination of President Carter’s presidency in the context of communication ethics important today.

Carter's integrity both helped and hurt his cause. His eagerness to fix so many problems at once propelled him to send "a host of initiatives to Congress only to conclude late that he had overloaded his initial legislative agenda" (Carter, 1982, p. 87). To put it simply, he may have bitten off more than he could chew. Still, even given his overzealous appetite for reform, Carter's agenda was also hamstrung by unforeseen and uncontrollable events unfolding both prior to and during his presidency, creating the "crisis of confidence" and prompting his subsequent address to the nation. America's existential crisis of the 1970s and Carter's ethical response to it opens up a second avenue through which one might assess his efforts, specifically, the effectiveness of his speech-making style and delivery.

In the way that artists paint with the same materials and work in the same location but create different portraits, no two presidents craft the same message even when using many of the same tools. A president's success in communicating messages to the nation is dependent upon the speaker's ingenuity, imagination, and inspiration (Rosenman, et al., 1976). The so-called "great" presidents often emerge, thanks, in part, to their "individual style of operation" when responding to crises in a given moment (Rosenman, et al., 1976, p. xv). Considering Ronald Reagan's penchant for public speaking dating back to his days as an actor, we know that he ascended to the presidency based partly on his ability to adapt his messages to different audiences. Carter, on the other hand, was largely considered by experts and members of the general population to be a dry speaker, one whose talks compared more to moralistic sermons rather than expressions of leadership.

Referencing his inaugural address, Safire (1977) criticized Carter's manner of delivery, describing it as "a themeless pudding, devoid of uplift or insight, defensive in outlook and timorous in its reach, straining five times to sell its 'new spirit' slogan in the absence of a message" (par. 2). From this perspective, Carter's style worked against him, causing the "crisis of confidence" speech and other speeches to fail due to their lack of execution and the inability of the speaker to personalize the messages. It remains prudent to learn whether Carter's message alone should have been enough, or whether the delivery and style of that message was vital to the reception of both Carter's speech and the speeches of presidents in general. In other words, are we more likely to laud presidents who possess charisma and gifted speech-making abilities than we are presidents whose messages are indelibly more significant but not as flashy? Perhaps so. As in the case with Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" address, "Speeches that were highly applauded at the moment of delivery may be reassessed quite differently over time, and sentiments rejected in their time may later be seen as prescient" (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008, p. 12). Pursuing this point, this dissertation contends that Carter's speech falls into the latter category, as does his presidency overall, largely given the ethos that grounded both.

A President and His Ethos

One of Carter's inspirations was Reinhold Neibuhr (2015) who wrote a great deal about the concept of justice, suggesting that it is often compounded by inadequacies in the distribution of power. In America, the rich are the powerful and, therefore, can more readily "buy" justice, whereas the poor are kept poor by existing on the shallow end of it. Neibuhr maintained that the lust for power prevents people from granting to others what

they claim for themselves (Neibuhr and Sifton, 2015, p. 152). Despite our ability to share with and care for others, we, inevitably, put our own desires above others' needs. This prevents the type of national unity that presidents supposedly seek. In *The Morality of Nations*, Neibuhr writes, "The fact that state and nation are roughly synonymous proves that, without the sentiment of nationality with its common language and traditions, the authority of government is usually unable to maintain national unity" (Neibuhr and Sifton, 2015, p. 210). During the 60s and early 70s, the government failed to maintain unity, in many cases adding to the friction between fractious groups and laying the ground for Carter's election in 1976.

Christopher Lasch's work on Narcissism also emerged during this time, and thematically it connects to the scholarship of Neibuhr. Also, Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* proved a source from which Carter took much inspiration for his "Crisis of Confidence" speech. Lasch (1979) described 1970s Americans as a culture of narcissists who had fallen victim to "psychiatric modes of thought, the spread of the 'new consciousness movement,' the dream of fame, and the anguished sense of failure" (p. 25). These narcissistic characteristics led to an increased dependence on therapeutic self-help models to validate self-esteem (Lasch, 1979). American self-esteem was also soothed via acquisitions of wealth and material goods, a practice that displaced the nurturing of one's spirit, thereby denying what Neibuhr (1949) considered an essential component of "genuine individuality" (p. 55). By the 1970s, Americans had reached a point whereby they remained "haunted by insecurity, dependent on outside experts and the media for validation, and sadly incapable of trust" (Blake, 2010, p. 21). Given the social and

political events of mid-twentieth century up to that point, one can understand that assertion.

Having been scarred by World War II, Vietnam, and Watergate, our national conscience experienced a gradual lack of trust in our national institutions during this time. This also damaged our national tradition of democracy being tied to faith. Now, skeptical of or even apathetic towards our democracy, we have put our faith in the hands of self-help and bureaucratic experts (Lasch, 1979). We expect immediate satisfaction, and we live according to a code of celebrity that suggests we should all become famous (Lasch, 1979). Carter was aware of this nation's leanings, and he attempted to restore the covenant between the American government and the people. In an interview given shortly after taking office, Carter (2014) suggested that faith and service were balms that could help heal the old wounds incurred during prior decades:

Anyone who reads the ancient words of the Old Testament with both sensitivity and care will find there the idea of government as something based on a voluntary covenant rather than force—the idea of equality before the law and the supremacy of law over the whims of any ruler; the idea of dignity of the individual human being and also of the individual conscience; the idea of service to the poor and the oppressed. (p. 80)

Carter's words parallel Robert Bellah's (1992) thoughts on covenants as well as the nature of humans in general. Bellah (1992) writes, "Always in the background and occasionally in the foreground [is] the notion that the world itself is in need of reform and rebirth" (p. 10). He further designates a particular aspect of reality that people *must* face:

that covenants are inevitably broken at one point or another (Arnett, 2010). This speaks to the duplicitous nature of humanity, our capacity to build and destroy.

Bellah argued that “the best and the worst in society or an individual are often closely related” (Bellah, 1992, p. 63). A fine line exists between how we behave and how we respond to ours and others’ behaviors. Americans responded to the energy crisis of the 1970s by failing to acknowledge their predilection for individualism and, instead, embraced narcissism. We are now experiencing many ill effects of that choice. However, we now have another choice in how we respond to the environmental and societal issues of today’s historical moment. One choice is to continue along the same path, thinking that others, namely politicians, theologians, and scientists, will fix the problem. Another choice is to accept the tenuous nature of an uncertain outcome and, despite the understanding that nothing is certain, can “roll up [our own] sleeves and work to right problematic issues” with the knowledge that the task may never be completed (Arnett, 2010, p. 231). Even as a public official, Carter chose to roll up his sleeves and work to fix large problems in the name of justice. Eizenstat (2018) suggests a particular Neibuhr passage that sums up Carter’s approach to politics rather succinctly: “The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world” (p. 38). Carter attempted to utilize politics to construct ethical policy that would benefit both the government and, more importantly, the average American. However, as it turned out, both sides resisted him and acted according to its proclivity for self-interest.

Upon entering office, Carter inherited a political mess, having “gained the presidency in a post-Vietnam and post-Watergate era of cynicism about government with a personal pledge that ‘I will never lie to you’” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 5). This was a

promise that Carter worked hard to keep, and a pledge such as this, in hindsight, remains “more important than ever in a new era of ‘fake news’ and post-truth political rhetoric” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 5). Ever truthful, Carter’s words were direct and, perhaps, too inconvenient for the nation. For example, during his inaugural address, Carter did not call for Americans to reach for the stars as J.F.K. had done, nor did he regale the public with patriotic rhetoric of the nation’s exalted place in history. Instead, he professed a need for limits and sacrifice, two politically unpopular themes at the time (Eizenstat, 2018).

In a subsequent address to the nation on April 18, 1977, Carter expressed, in no plain words, that the nation’s energy problem was worse than it had been during the 1973 embargo, and that dire consequences would follow if they failed to act (Carter 1977/2005). Carter also argued that the government was incapable of providing people with everything they might want (Eizenstat, 2018). Further, Carter argued that, by focusing solely on the “now,” the nation had not fully prepared for its future (Carter, 1977/2005). Specifically, this terse message directly reflects Christopher Lasch’s (1979) assertion that living for the moment, for oneself, is now the prime directive. No longer is it to live for our predecessors or posterity. In 1979, faced with yet another embargo, rising inflation, a crisis in the Middle East, and a fallout of public faith, Carter warned that the country remained dependent on foreign oil and extravagant living (Balmer, 2014).

Yet, Carter’s frank words in each of these cases suggested an underlying issue. In a July 27, 1979 editorial in the *National Review*, it was posited that the nation’s problems with energy represented social-class issues which divide the haves and the have-nots. More affluent people wanted “clean air, tourist-free forests, uncrowded and oil-free

beaches, happy caribou and snail-darters,” while the less affluent “want jobs, raises, economic expansion, and enough gas to get the family to a public beach.” According to the opinion of the editorial’s writers, there existed no way to reconcile the division (Horowitz, 2005, p. 54). This posed a challenge for Carter, particularly given his intellectual approach to the situation. The people wanted abundant energy, not an education nor accusations of how materialistic and wasteful they were (Horowitz, 2005). Critics argue that, while the nation general favored Carter as a person, they were dismayed by his show of leadership in this regard. It is also suggested that many of Carter’s political wounds were self-inflicted, and damage may have been prevented with more effective communicative instincts.

Take, for example, Carter’s first major address to the nation on energy, delivered April 18, 1977, whereby he waded into the rhetorical waters and outlined his plans for a new energy policy. Carter modeled the speech after Franklin Roosevelt’s fireside chats. In theory, the strategy was well-considered. Yet, in practice, the message fell short of expectations, due largely to the nature of the medium. Roosevelt’s success as an orator hinged on, and was enhanced by, radio. Through it, FDR effectively utilized “aristocratic cadences to inspire the confidence of a frightened people” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 165). Carter, however, “using the contemporary, more intimate medium of television, presented himself in a beige cardigan,” thereby establishing an image of himself as simply a citizen rather than the President of the United States (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 165/Campbell and Jamieson, 1990, p. 205-206). Further, by being framed on television sitting in the comfort of the White House, in front of a warming fire, all the while calling for energy

conservation, higher prices, and sacrifice from the American people, Carter had conveyed a message that ran contrary from the one intended (Eizenstat, 2018).

Eizenstat (2018) suggests that Carter's address began on a down note of impending doom, which is not the kind of feeling Americans want from their leaders. Furthermore, "instead of holding out hope—the essential currency of leadership—he doled-out criticism of America as 'the most wasteful nation on earth'" (Eizenstat, 2018). Following Eizenstat's line of thought, it would appear that Carter's words, while well-crafted and filled with ethos, pathos, and logos, were better suited for a preacher forewarning his congregation of the approaching apocalypse. Consider the speech's first line: "Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem that is unprecedented in our history" (Carter, 1977). However, if viewing his rhetorical engagement with the nation from a different perspective, one can argue that Carter was articulating "a realist style of leadership" that appropriately conveyed a sense of warning about the nation's energy limits (Mattson, 2009, p. 16). As with "Crisis of Confidence" speech, while the arguments at the heart of his national addresses remain significant today and are worth revisiting. By doing so, we can extrapolate the substance in lieu of what may have been Carter's stylistic shortcomings.

Carter's enduring qualities as president included his work to provide something for everyone; he desired not to offend or put-off people or groups that had vested interests (either political or otherwise) in various policy issues. Despite this approach, he was accused of keeping important members of his administration out of the loop when making decisions. These leadership paradoxes often caused rifts within his administration, and even his own supporters occasionally described him as weak,

disorganized, and vague. Inevitably, the American voters agreed; they rejected Carter's messages and embraced Reagan's more hopeful rhetoric and his insistence that the problem was Carter and not the average American.

In the end, Carter's greatest virtue may also have been his greatest weakness, as he took on "intractable problems with comprehensive solutions while disregarding the political consequences" (Eizenstat, 2018, pp. 1-2). Carter believed that the actions he took as president should be judged on their merits and not dependent upon political biases from either his party or a rival party (Eizenstat, 2018). Yet, having lived his life as a moderate, more fiscally conservative and more socially liberal, he was deemed *too* conservative for the liberals and *too* liberal for the conservatives. This contributed to his downfall in the election of 1980. His evangelical base, which had helped him get elected in 1976, largely abandoned him. Leaders of the Religious Right deployed their newly emerging media empires and spoke in politically coded language about the need for righteous leadership, which they asserted Carter failed to provide. This is also a great irony of the Carter presidency, considering his devotion to human rights, which was the central concern of his administration from day one (Balmer, 2014).

Crisis of Confidence: Then and Now

During the election cycle of 1980, Americans expected each candidate (Carter and Reagan) to provide solutions to the country's energy and economic problems that had plagued it throughout much of the 1970s. Initially, in 1976, voters aligned with Carter's campaign platform of humility, determination, and sacrifice but realigned themselves with Reagan's vision of exceptionalism, might, and entitlement, which only encouraged the behaviors that Lasch and Bellah wrote about. As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s,

Jimmy Carter's efforts to alter the ethical path of the nation went unrealized, thanks in part to Reagan's rhetoric, which cast him as the white knight leading America into a new age of prosperity. Lee (2010) states, "Reagan . . . turned Carter's discourse into a pessimistic and constitutive element of the liberal view of America" (p. 810). He argued that Carter blamed the American people for his own failures. Thus, Reagan substituted the rhetoric of presidential incompetence for the rhetoric of American malaise and used it to craft the uplifting themes that are so strongly associated with his presidency: "morning in America," "a new beginning," "a city upon a hill," "ordinary American heroes," and all the rest (Lee, 2010, p. 810). Reagan absolved the nation of any responsibility for the crisis, reinforcing the belief that Carter was the problem all along.

Reagan's manifest destiny meta-narrative of America using its might to pursue its own happiness has, at points throughout its history, been motivated by the individual's right and need to accumulate power, to achieve a greater status in the eyes of others. According to Clark (1998), "It is assumed that we live in a world of scarcity where survival demands competition—and that adaptation means being smarter, cleverer, or more powerful than others" (p. 647). This philosophy has ultimately shaped our national attitude and led us to pursue "actions with the spirit of progress and undue optimism" (Arnett, 2013, p. 244). In the lead-up to the 1980 election, Reagan took advantage of the frustrations of a large portion of the population and painted a picture of an America that was weak domestically and internationally, and created a groundswell of optimism. He also tapped into the peoples' penchant for purchasing.

The questions Reagan asked were infused with plenty of pathos, all designed to turn them against the sitting president: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago . . .? Is America as respected throughout the world as it was . . . that we're as strong as we were four years ago?" (Reagan, 1980). By framing the crisis in such a way, Reagan, "The Great Communicator" (Nunberg, 2004, par. 1), might also have been the great preacher of that historical moment with a large segment of Americans assuming the role of his faithful congregation. Indeed, Reagan won the 1980 election by a wide margin of 489 to 49 Electoral College votes, and garnered nearly 8.5 million more popular votes (270 to win).

Granted, in 1979-1980, the nation *was* in dire financial straits and Reagan was only confirming the obvious. At the time, inflation hovered around 13 percent, energy prices soared, and jobs diminished (Eizenstat, 2018). Mirroring 1979-1980, today we remain locked in a clash of philosophies over energy policy that has brought us to the precipice of another crisis of confidence. The rhetoric of American nationalism, narcissism, and excess continues, while the nation's citizens are once again "losing faith not just in government but in their ability to shape our democracy" (Carter, 1979). It could be argued that America has yet to gain back the faith that it had lost during the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, our historical moment requires communication educators and scholars to provide students with a pathway to understanding the virtues of civil discourse and the importance of historical moments, to draw parallels between the words of leaders in the past and present so that they may chart our nation's future. Instructors would be wise to impart a sense of "why" in their teaching practices that will dissuade students from engaging in purely narcissistic, consumer-driven practices, motivated only

by the “now,” and, instead, offering them a choice to be learners responsible for our world (Arnett, 2013).

In this sense, instructors in the field of communication have a chance to be “lamp holders” who inspire students and help light their way, providing a sense of existential hope for the future (Arnett, 2013, p. 117). Further, an appreciation of the work that is involved in attempting to restore the broken covenant between the people and our institutions is essential (Arnett, 2010). Otherwise, we attempt to manipulate and control our certainties, attempting to create an existence out of the sum of our collected objects (Arnett, 2010). The problem is not that we need to be rid of control, but finding a new manner of control that will allow for a greater freedom within the institution (Bellah, 1992). Bellah insists that a recognition of a broken covenant does not suggest a rejection of an institution’s past. Rather, it reaffirms the need for institutions’ members to accept that they are not innocent nor are they the saviors of humankind. Together, we must “pick up the broken pieces [and try] to start again. . . That too is part of our tradition” (Bellah, 1992, p. 141-142). Perhaps, taking one final cue from President Carter, by altering our practices we can “rekindle our sense of unity, our confidence in the future, and give our nation and all of us individually a new sense of purpose” (Carter, 1979). Given the current political, environmental, and social unrest in America during this historical moment, it may be wise to revisit and reconsider Carter’s words.

Preview of Chapters

Subsequent chapters in “The Rhetoric of Jimmy Carter: Renewing America’s Confidence in Civic Leadership through Speech and Political Education” will proceed as follows: Chapter 2 will further contextualize the “Crisis of Confidence” speech using

Carter's 1977 energy plan address as a springboard. The philosophy behind the speech will be detailed, as will Carter's political struggles in passing his proposed energy bill. This chapter will also delve further into the mindset of both the nation and Carter with respect to its energy consumption. Against this backdrop, Carter's intellectual biography—his motivations and inspirations which influenced his energy policy decisions—will be examined. The scholarly works relevant to this chapter are Neibuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*, Bellah's, "Human Conditions for a Good Society," and Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. How each of these works influenced Carter's public service and his "Crisis of Confidence" speech will be discussed.

Chapter 3 will examine the crafting of the "Crisis of Confidence" speech, drawing upon scholarly analysis and Carter's personal notes. Also, the delivery and presentation of the speech will be studied from an audience's perspective. The speech's content will be juxtaposed with the style of its presentation in an attempt to postulate why the speech succeeded at first but, ultimately, failed to resonate with the American people and the government of the United States as a whole, thereby leading to the election of Ronald Reagan as the nation's fortieth president. To do this, Carter's speechmaking tendencies and style will be compared and contrasted with Ronald Reagan's, whom many consider, perhaps, the nation's greatest presidential communicator.

Chapter 4 will present the scholarly and lay reactions to Carter's speech, particularly, those of Christopher Lasch, Daniel Bell, and Robert Bellah. Their reactions will be juxtaposed with Carter's finished speech product, with the goal in mind of revealing how each scholar's philosophies both coincided and differed from the messages

ultimately expressed by Carter. Additionally, the chapter will study whether, post-speech, America has passed through the crisis of confidence of the 1970s into a new existential dilemma, or whether the narcissistic mindset of the 1970s has embedded itself within the nation's collective.

Lastly, Chapter 5 will connect the speech with the field of communication, drawing specific correlations between Carter's 1979 speech and his historical moment and the areas of speechmaking, presidential rhetoric, and communication ethics. The dissertation will examine both style and content in presidential speeches and whether either element more greatly affects how a speech is received by an audience. With regard to communication ethics, the dissertation will isolate and focus on America's ethical behavior toward the environment and, using Carter as the example, will present potential political and social implications for how presidents in times of crises use their words to lead a government and a nation of people with so many conflicting interests. By way of analyzing these areas within rhetoric and communication, the hope here is to reveal that President Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech is an important marker for assessing our leaders as well as ourselves.

Chapter 2: Carter's Intellectual Biography: Contextualizing the "Crisis of Confidence" Speech

Introduction

Suspense gripped the nation for ten days following the 1979, July 4 holiday. President Carter had abruptly cancelled a scheduled July 5 address on energy (it was to be the President's fifth such address on the topic), and had retreated to Camp David for a mysterious extended stay (Eizenstat, 2018/Horowitz, 2005). When Carter emerged from Camp David and delivered his "Crisis of Confidence" speech from the confines of the Oval Office on July 15, 65 million Americans watched. The speech would become "the most memorable and controversial" public address delivered "by an American president in the second half of the twentieth century" (Horowitz, 2004, p. 225). What made it both memorable and controversial is the manner in which the president addressed the nation. Like a parent speaking to a teenager guilty of bad behavior, Carter delivered a message to the television audience that they were lost and needed to alter their practices.

Carter's address would subsequently be slapped with the rhetorical moniker the "malaise" speech. Years later, the designation would infamously, and mistakenly, come to define Carter's presidency. Yet, "Malaise" simply fails to frame Carter's speech accurately. In fact, many scholars consider the national address to be Carter's most effective display of presidential leadership. At the time, the public supported that assessment as well. Shortly after the speech, a Gallup poll recorded a spike of 17 points in Carter's approval rating. It was "the greatest gain ever recorded by a modern president in such a short time, except for a speech seeking a declaration of war" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 691). Part of the reason for the popularity spike was the speech's content, which was both

brutally honest and rhetorically insightful. It struck a nerve with a large swath of the population.

The president drew inspiration for the speech largely from the works of Christopher Lasch, Daniel Bell, and Robert Bellah. Specifically, he alluded to the themes expressed by Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), and Bellah's "Human Conditions for a Good Society" (1979). The three scholars had emerged during the 1970s as harsh critics of American culture, which they perceived as one driven largely by individualism, consumption, and entitlement. Carter, after numerous conversations with his chief pollster, Pat Caddell (who had agreed wholeheartedly with the perspectives of Lasch, Bell, and Bellah) attempted to draw national attention to this dilemma.

What propelled Carter's decision to speak to the nation about such an abstract, philosophical, and rhetorical issue, particularly given the nation's desire for tangibles, i.e., jobs and energy? For insight, it is prudent to turn to Reinhold Niebuhr, whose philosophical tenet "justice in a sinful world" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 38) would serve as a compass for Carter throughout his life as a public servant, both from a political and spiritual standpoint. Carter's reliance on his faith when making policy decisions remains vital to the makeup of the nation's 39th president, and is, perhaps, best understood if viewing these decisions through the lens of Niebuhr, as this chapter will do. The chapter will also examine Carter's ethos and logos for the speech against the backdrop of his proposed 1977 energy bill. The bill's lasting positive effects will be discussed, as will the lasting effects of Carter's other successes in office. This will lay the groundwork for an examination of the philosophies of Christopher Lasch, Daniel Bell, and Robert Bellah,

and how their work connected to and influenced Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech and, further, how the speech subsequently influences the field of communication today, particularly leadership communication, presidential rhetoric, and communication ethics.

Carter and Niebuhr: A President's Strongest Influence

Born in Missouri on June 21, 1892, Reinhold Niebuhr's theology, philosophy, and social commentary would help shape the American twentieth-century (Lovin, 1995). From an early age, the seeds for Niebuhr's attitudes towards politics were planted and sowed by "his father's reaction against German authoritarianism and his appropriation of Midwestern egalitarianism and patriotism" (Stone, 1972, p. 17). In fact, both Niebuhr's father and mother provided a grounding for his religiousness, and imbued him and his siblings "with a fervor for the values of freedom and equality and a high priority to the values of the academic life" (Stone, 1972, p. 19; Bingham, 1961). At an early age, Niebuhr's attraction to both religion and politics emerged and, as an adult, he would attempt to answer an important question: "*How can we resist cynicism in public life and sustain hope when our ideals are tested, frustrated, and betrayed?*" (Maier, 2018, p. 346). Inevitably, this question would propel his theological and social career post-graduate school.

From 1915-1928, he took a position as pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit with the goal of helping others "separate hope from illusions so that religious faith would not perish with the shattering of illusions" (Stone, 1972, p. 25). Eventually, Niebuhr moved from Detroit to New York City, having realized that "somewhere between cynicism and hypocrisy there was a way to articulate the relevance of faith to social man" (Stone, 1972, p. 34). Hence, his desire to "reinterpret the Christian faith so

that it could serve man's needs in a technological society" had been established (Stone, 1972, p. 34). In addition, blended with his keen sense of religious direction, was an unwavering commitment to political interests (Stone, 1972). Niebuhr's theological and social perspectives, though occasionally veering back and forth, would become woven into the American social and political fabric of what was a wartime historical moment.

Niebuhr rose to the "status of America's most prominent theologian" with the publication of two major works: *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in 1932 and *The Nature and Destiny of Man* in 1941 and 1943 (Halliwell, 2005, p. 3). In a 1948 *Time* magazine feature, it was postulated that "Niebuhr's strength as a thinker lay in his ability to make tangible the links between theological abstractions and social realities, without reducing religion to slogans or to sentimentality" (Halliwell, 2005, p. 4). Niebuhr himself established his position in the new Cold War world, arguing, "Modern man knows a great deal about the atom, [but] almost nothing about the nature of God, almost never thinks about it, and is complacently unaided that there may be any reason to" (Halliwell, 2005; Chambers, 1948, p. 70). Thus, his allusion to and his belief in original sin was an ideal juxtaposition to America's almost continuous fear of atomic destruction (Halliwell, 2005). Niebuhr responded further to the air of uncertainty during the middle part of the century by advocating for a liberal Protestantism and a social ethic of *Christian realism*, which emphasizes a public life of action balanced by an awareness of the costs, limits, and consequences of those actions (Maier, 2018).

This comes with an acknowledgement of our sinfulness and our human imperfections. Niebuhr himself recognized the precariousness of our human existence, as well as its finitude. Therefore, we struggle to balance the knowledge of our own limited

time on earth with our struggle to grasp the objects of our hopes and dreams. Failure to know the manifestation of those hopes and dreams, despite our struggles, is part of the irony and beauty of the dual nature of humanity (Maier, 2018). Therefore, Niebuhr is cognizant of overreach, seeking “to act where change is possible, the grace to accept when change cannot come, and the wisdom to discern the possibilities that are truly open to us” (Maier, 2018, p. 347). Ultimately, through a recognition of human limitations, we can ultimately forgive others as well as ourselves, leading to a kind of baptism by grace, reconciliation, and renewal (Maier, 2018). This is exactly the kind of public life, buoyed by Niebuhr’s perspective on faith, which Jimmy Carter ultimately came to fulfill.

Ultimately, Niebuhr wanted to awaken “the spiritual and moral conscience of the nation, identifying areas in which the country was in danger of overreaching itself, and sending out a series of warnings on the social and international problems that it faced” (Halliwell, 2005, p. 4). Here, Carter connects directly to Niebuhr, for Niebuhr knew that individuals could never solve social problems by themselves, no matter the extent of their influence. Yet, he also understood that America needed dynamic leadership, otherwise the nation’s social, religious, and cultural life “would lose its vitality and become increasingly at the mercy of a ‘technical civilization’ driven by greed” (Halliwell, 2005, p. 249). Carter conveys the sentiment in the following portion of his “Crisis of Confidence” speech:

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. (Carter, 1979)

This passage offers a hint of what Niebuhr may have thought of Carter as a leader. Carter's leadership style was widely seen as lacking among both critics and the public. Yet, Carter maintained a philosophical parallel to Niebuhr's thought. This serves as evidence that Carter was forward thinking and prophetic as was Niebuhr's concept of an essential American leader.

It is nothing new to say that key to Jimmy Carter's leadership as president (and his career post-presidency) was, and still is, his Christian faith. He regarded political life as a vocation, a chance to spread the message of the Gospel to the country, thereby making faith a central and fundamental aspect of his presidency (Berggren, 2005). By allowing his faith to guide his presidential decisions, Carter achieved considerable success with a number of foreign policy initiatives: the SALT II agreement, the establishment of a more positive relationship with Latin America through the Panama Canal Treaty, and the first brokered peace between Israel and Egypt, i.e., the Camp David Accords (Eizenstat, 2018; Berggren, 2005). At home, Carter focused on energy and, what would become, perhaps, his most enduring legacy—human rights. Former Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, referred to Carter as “one of our most intelligent chief executives, who showed a fierce dedication to conflict prevention and individual human dignity” (2018, p. xvii). Carter's almost singular focus on humanity grew out of his desire to be a different politician, one who embodied Niebuhr's philosophy that the duty of politics is to “establish justice in a sinful world” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 38). The justice that

Carter sought was not only for his fellow Americans, but his fellow human beings in other parts of the world.

Carter once admitted that Niebuhr was his favorite theologian, having read a great deal of his work. Yet, Carter “was more interested in the relationship between faith and practical ethics than he was in complex theological discussions” (Halliwell, 2005, p. 256). Carter used Niebuhr’s scholarship to enhance his understanding of how to navigate “public affairs and political adversaries, how to apply Christian principles to the vocation of public life” (Balmer, 2014, p. 20). By allowing faith to inform his actions, Carter attained praxis, using the presidency as “a powerful means of serving God and neighbor” (Berggren, 2005, p. 46). While serving both, Carter maintained a boundary between the two, remaining true to the philosophy of the separation of Church and State, a tradition that dated to the Protestant Reformation (Horowitz, 2004). Dumbrell (1995) calls Carter’s religious position “a kind of optimistic Niebuhrism” as he “strove to avoid dogmatism and rigid ideologies at every turn” (Halliwell, 2005, p. 257; Dumbrell, 1995, p. 19). He objected to “public displays of religiosity” that had been a trademark of the Johnson and Nixon administrations (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 38; footnote on Carter interview p. 906), and he did away with White House ornamentations and status symbols, such as fancy tablecloths, special limousine services, and ranked seating at meals (Horowitz, 2004).

Yet, beyond these seemingly more trivial practices, Carter comes closest to a Niebuhrian position based on his practiced attempts to demonstrate that American idealism could have a positive influence on foreign affairs. Carter’s approach in these matters was a practical one, the principles of which “were the best foundation for the exertion of American power and influence” (Halliwell, 2005; Carter, 1982, p. 19). Carter

used love and justice to build relationships and dialogues between himself and other world leaders. Thus, he achieved a level of leadership that Niebuhr sought in American presidents and civil leaders (Halliwell, 2005). In fact, Halliwell (2005) notes that the two leadership models closest to Niebuhrian positions are Martin Luther King Jr. and Jimmy Carter, for they “put as much emphasis on compassion, fostering loving relationships and human rights as they did social justice” (p. 260). Carter was also well-aware that his propensity for morality in political life would attract criticism from those who thought him dogmatic, and those who accused him of naïveté and inconsistency (Halliwell, 2005; footnote: #55, p. 322). This reflects Niebuhr’s contention that those who work in the public realm must be cognizant “of the potential costs, inevitable limits, and unintended consequences of what they say and do” (Maier, 2018, p. 346). Carter embodied the Niebuhrian sense of Christian realism, given that, despite his moral convictions and his choices based on them, Carter recognized the dark side of humanity and its ability to turn his good intentions into evils.

Yet, his faith enabled his hope that we might overcome our weaknesses and failings by recognizing our past, committing to our present, and planning for our future. This theme emerges quite clearly in his “Crisis of Confidence” speech:

All the traditions of our past, all the lessons of our heritage, all the promises of our future point to another path -- the path of common purpose and the restoration of American values. That path leads to true freedom for our nation and ourselves. We can take the first steps down that path as we begin to solve our energy problem. (Carter, 1979)

Carter was not advocating for an external fix, something magical to descend upon us and alter our path. Rather, he is ready to dive into the pile and begin work, and he invites us to do the same. A motivation to work pushes hope towards “tenacious hope,” which “lives within the actions of those who do not cease laboring and struggling for change—no matter the obstacles or difficulties” (Arnett, 2015, p. 262). While Carter, perhaps, faltered in the execution of his solutions to the energy crisis and our crisis of confidence, what remains important is *what* he attempted to achieve for us and *why* he did so.

This circles back to Niebuhr, and illuminates the connection between he and Carter. For Niebuhr, the major areas of liberalism which influenced his thought were politics, theology, economy, and history. Further, Niebuhr placed his trust in the moral progress of history (Stone, 1972). Jimmy Carter, as a leader and believer in moral progress of history, was a latter twentieth-century embodiment of Niebuhr’s philosophy, which is a reason why his presidency must not be so quickly dismissed. An American president does not solely cause national predicaments, such as the ones which Carter faced during his term in office. Nor does an American president, despite noble efforts to lead, solely determine the path through such predicaments. This becomes evident when examining President Carter’s initial 1977 energy bill and the many political obstacles he encountered in his attempts to pass, what he considered, morally-driven legislation.

Carter’s 1977 Energy Bill and its Enduring Ethos

The winter of 1976-77 was one of the most severe in American history up to that point. Temperatures were brutally cold, and there was a shortage of natural gas in both the northeast and in the industrial Midwest (Eizenstat, 2018). Pennsylvania and New York were among those states hit the hardest and, in the early days of his presidency,

Jimmy Carter declared both states “disaster areas” due to the gas shortages. He subsequently appealed to Congress to grant him emergency authority to order for gas to be pumped into the interstate pipelines (Eizenstat, 2018). Perhaps sensing the need for continued swift action resultant from the harsh winter, Carter unleashed his “moral equivalency of war” (Carter, 1977) in the drafting of his comprehensive energy bill. However, his exuberance in tackling the energy issue, thereby setting the country “on an irreversible course toward regaining its lost energy security,” led to a number of political problems (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 137). By diving head-first into energy policy which, at the time, was a hotly-contested issue, Carter jeopardized his political reputation and put the success of his presidency at stake.

This is interesting to note, given that energy was, arguably, the most significant issue of the day, one that required the most care, and one that reflected, perhaps more than any other issue, the state of America’s standing as a world power. The nation was at a crossroads, and Carter knew it. Eizenstat (2018) concedes, “Without fear of exaggeration, I believe that Jimmy Carter did more than any president, past or future, to change U.S. energy policy for the better and to prepare our nation for the sound energy future we now enjoy” (p. 141). Despite this, Carter’s tenuous relationship with Congress, which would last throughout his presidency, began here with the formation of the energy bill, for Carter was less concerned about his political standing with Congress than his standing with the American people. He set out to achieve what was best for the nation—energy independence—and he believed that placating politicians’ egos and choosing ideological sides were obstacles to such achievement (Berggren, 2005).

Carter desired to reshape the future of America's energy, foreseeing, even before other political leaders, the dangers of America's increasing dependence on foreign oil (Eizenstat, 2018). He believed that he could successfully convert other politicians to his cause, that the government had a moral duty to engage the issue, and that politicking would be unnecessary (Reuchel, 1994). Unfortunately, this only proved partly the case. In the Democratic-controlled House, the energy bill passed rather easily by a healthy margin on August 5, 1977, only three and one-half months after Carter presented the plan to Congress. However, the bill would be "stalled in the Senate for almost a year" and almost "completely emasculated" in the process (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 181). Even many within the Democratic Party who had initially supported the President's plan in the House of Representatives eventually withdrew their support once they witnessed the dismantling of the bill in the Senate (Light, 1978). Despite Congress's hack-job on Carter's bill, Shaffer (1995) contends that pressure from interest groups is the primary reason that the bill ultimately met its fate, particularly given the way in which lobbyists can more easily target politicians with ties to various interests.

Herein lies the double-edged sword that presidents often must wield—attempting to pass legislation while facing pressure from the agendas of both Congress and the lobbyists. Unfortunately, the drama surrounding the bill's assembly and its subsequent handling by the Senate "seriously hurt Carter's credibility and portrayed him as a weak, ineffective leader" (Shaffer, 1995, p. 292). Yet, the presence of so many egos, allegiances, and loyalties to lobbying interests can often result in the chopping of policy proposals to the point whereby they become nearly unrecognizable from their original forms or simply defeated entirely. The pluralist desires of those who comprise the

governing body and their corporate interests, in this case, defied Carter's call for personal sacrifice, effectively denying passage of the energy bill in its original form (Shaffer, 1995). Of the ten proposals presented by Carter's administration, seven were approved with no changes by the House of Representatives, while the Senate only approved two without changes (Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 1977).

Speaking to the difficulties inherent in presidents' attempts to pass legislation, Rockman (1984) posits a number of "central elements which effect the nation's ability to grapple with comprehensive policies" (Shaffer, 1995, p. 293). These "five constraints," as he refers to them are: 1) "Our individualized political culture," 2) The Separation of Powers, 3) "Weak political parties," 4) "The local and regional tensions which exist in the American polity," and 5) "First Amendment freedoms and the press" (date from Rockman). These multi-layered bi-products of our government and society were obstacles that Carter faced, not only during the attempted passage of his energy bill, but also throughout his presidency in general (Shaffer, 1995). It also circles back to Niebuhr, who maintained that special interests were an obstacle to justice.

As though commenting directly on Carter's energy bill dilemma, Niebuhr (2015) writes, "The creeds and institutions of democracy have never become fully divorced from the special interests of the commercial classes who conceived and developed them" (Niebuhr & Siffon, p. 160). In Washington, these special interests tend to assert more power in the Senate. Eizenstat (2018) maintains, "The Founders envisioned the Senate as a more deliberative body, a brake on the instincts of the lower house, which presumably would be subject to the caprices of popular opinion" (p. 180). In other words, the Senate flexes more power than the House of Representatives, but remains more susceptible to

the types of special interests to which Niebuhr refers. Additionally, senators are more sensitive to slights from both the president and other political constituents, so much so that, at any given time, a substantial number of representatives in Congress believe that he/she should *be* the president (Eizenstat, 2018).

Herein lies another problem, and yet another connection to Niebuhr (2015), who contends, “As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic, and national groups, they take for themselves, whatever their power can command” (p. 156). In this case, the power of the congressional herd thwarted Carter. Given his view that energy was a moral issue, arguably he failed to appreciate the “brutal character of the behavior of all human collectives” (Niebuhr and Sifton, 2015, p. 145). That collective was the very government that Carter attempted to sway. Clearly, “the makers of the constitution succeeded, perhaps more than they might have wished, in creating not just a brake on the actions of the House, but a graveyard of hopes” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 180). During the late 1970s, many of Carter’s energy initiatives vanished in this graveyard.

What we can glean from this situation, however, is *why* Carter did what he did, and what he hoped to achieve. Niebuhr’s scholarship offers insight into Carter’s ethos, which is at the heart of his accomplishments, and what communication ethics scholars can draw from as they move into future historical moments. Specifically, this aspect of Carter’s presidency can provide a constructive hermeneutic for our continuing problems with narcissism and individualism. Carter, perhaps taking a cue from Niebuhr, recognized the difficulties inherent when attempting to use religion as a means to achieve political success (Ruechel, 1994). Carter acknowledged the failings and struggles of humans and

worked to change their faith in government, in themselves, and in the future, suggesting that doing so would lead to an increase in our national freedom (Carter, 1979). Various leaders from Reagan through George W. Bush have celebrated American freedom without attempting to really define it, and dodged “any serious engagement with the social, cultural, and moral incongruities arising from the pursuit of actually existing freedom” (Bacevich, 2008, p. 27). American exceptionalism is at the heart of this practice. Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, was closer to a true understanding of Niebuhr’s philosophy, for Carter advocated for achieving freedom through sacrifice, not through entitlement, which became an American trait in the latter portion of modernity.

Bacevich (2008), in his analysis of Niebuhr and American presidents, detail four sins associated with America in modernity: 1) the sin of American Exceptionalism, 2) “the indecipherability of history,” 3) “the false allure of simple solutions,” and 4) “the imperative of appreciating the limits of power” (p. 27). Carter, arguably, shunned each of these “sins” in his attempt to lead the nation out of the energy crisis. Where Americans had, by the 1970s come to see themselves as above the fray and their actions beyond question, Carter argued in the “Crisis of Confidence” speech that Americans were faced with the choice of pursuing a “mistaken idea of freedom, the right to grasp for ourselves some advantage over others” (1979). Carter advocated for a unified American purpose devoted to the pursuit of lifting others up, not attempting to gain supremacy over them.

Carter worked to achieve synthesis between an individual’s sense of morality and the larger social sense, thereby stymying the individual’s move toward individualism (Reuchel, 1994). According to Niebuhr, (1961) “Man . . . is a sinner not because his is one limited individual within a whole but rather because he is betrayed by his very ability

to survey the whole [and] to imagine himself the whole” (p. 17). Humans have traditionally trodden the line between reason, nature, and spirituality, and often their “failure to observe the limits of [their] finite existence causes [them] to defy the forms and restraints of both nature and reason” (p. 17). Humans historically use science in an attempt to achieve perfection and overcome their human weaknesses, yet, their imperfect nature will always prevent this. More so, given the desire to rise above limitations, humans tend to place themselves above all other things. This desire—otherwise known as *individualism*—permits “the illusion of standing above history and traditions” (Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007, p. 117). As Niebuhr (1961) maintained, “Human self-consciousness is a high tower looking upon a large and inclusive world” (p. 17). Our vanity presumes that this narrow tower is our entire world; we fail to recognize that this tower is built upon shifting sands that could, ultimately, cause our demise (Niebuhr, 1961). For Niebuhr (1961), and subsequently for Carter, “Virtue can be achieved only through the annihilation of the individual’s will” (p. 58). Therefore, Carter’s hope and faith was in empowered people taking charge of social groups, placing selflessness and self-sacrifice at the forefront, and thereby promoting social justice (Reuchel, 1994).

A difference between Carter and Niebuhr’s outlook on humans may have been their outlooks on faith. Carter maintained faith in the human capacity for good, and that people could use their goodness to reform large groups rather than be corrupted by collective sinfulness (Reuchel, 1994). Niebuhr, meanwhile, (2015) argued, “The task of building a just society seems always to be a hopeless one when only present realities and immediate possibilities are envisaged” (p. 194). Here, Niebuhr draws a distinction between rationality and religious ethics, arguing that the rational ethic’s aim is justice,

while the aim of religious ethics is love (2015). For Niebuhr, love “meets the needs of the neighbor without carefully weighing and comparing his needs with those of the self. It is therefore ethically purer than the justice, which is prompted by reason” (2015, p. 191). Niebuhr suggests that rationality compares the needs of the group with those of the self. Religion, out of love, places the needs of the neighbor before the self, which calls to mind Levinas, who reasoned that the twisted modern rhetoric of the west “preaches from a self-described text”: 1) a failure to attend, 2) a failure to listen, and 3) a failure to respond (Arnett, 2017, p. 27). Niebuhr, and subsequently Carter, most likely would argue that an antidote to modernity’s problems is religion inspired by love and tempered by a resistance to dogmatism. Yet, there are also subtleties of difference in the two perspectives. Carter’s driving metaphor was love, while Niebuhr’s was justice *balanced* by love (Maier, 2014). For Carter, sin could be overcome by love, whereas only struggle could overcome sin for Niebuhr (Reuchel, 1994). Through love, social groups could mobilize, overcome selfishness, and achieve true social justice (Reuchel, 1994). Yet, by the mid-1970s, America had already fallen victim to a culture of narcissism in an age of diminished expectations (Lasch, 1979), eventually leading Carter to draft the “Crisis of Confidence,” speech.

Critics suggest that modern leaders and politicians cherry-pick pieces of Niebuhr’s scholarship in order to “bolster their own preconceived convictions,” and, in reality, actually “mangle his meaning and distort his intentions” (Bacevich, 2008, p. 25). Carter has fallen victim to similar criticism, the assertion being that his knowledge of Niebuhr was more superficial than sophisticated, and that he often failed to correctly apply Niebuhr’s fundamental arguments to his own rhetoric (Reuchel, 1994). An

opposing argument is that Carter simply chose to discard Niebuhr's more pessimistic views about human-kind and replace them with his own (Reuchel, 1994). Reuchel (1994) contests that Carter's "exaggerated optimism" enabled this practice and propelled his political career (p. 20). The argument here, however, is that Carter's motivations stemmed more from his hope and faith rather than an innate sense of optimism. In an interview with PRI's *The World* in 2018, Carter was asked from where his optimism comes. The interviewer uses the word "optimism," yet Carter responds with only the word "faith." In fact, throughout the course of the interview, Carter intones the words "faith" and "hope" a combined fourteen times, when discussing his life and work, while never uttering the word "optimism" (Carter).

The differentiation between optimism and hope is crucial to Carter's presidential leadership, while faith is the motivating factor of the latter. Christopher Lasch (1991) speaks to Niebuhr's philosophy regarding hope, using it to distinguish hope from optimism. He maintains that the dark side of life, namely evil, must be acknowledged and not merely attributed to humans falling behind science. Taking a cue from Lasch, Carter ties together hope *and* faith, thereby making a rhetorical turn towards tenacious hope and, by extent, Otherness (Arnett, 2015/Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007). When Otherness is attained, individualism—the desire to "stand above history and affect the future"—is nullified (Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007, p. 115). In this regard, Carter's ethos completes a rhetorical shift, threading together faith, tenacious hope, and Otherness, thereby providing leadership alternatives to optimism. As with Lasch's distinction between hope and optimism, his scholarship on narcissism is an essential component of the Carter

narrative. Lasch's famous work, *The Culture of Narcissism*, and Carter's use of its key themes throughout his "Crisis" speech, is the focus of the next section.

Carter and Lasch: A Speech's Grounding

Christopher Lasch (or "Kit" as his friends and colleagues called him) was born in Nebraska in 1932, into an "impeccably progressive" household, influenced by midwestern traditions and virtues (Beer, 2005; Elshtain 1995). Lasch's father worked as a newspaper editor for the *Chicago Sun* and *Sun Times*, as well as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. His mother, primarily a social worker, also taught logic at Washington University and other schools (Beer, 2005; footnote 5). With their intellectual and public careers, Lasch's parents had provided a template for their son to follow and, throughout his own career, Lasch would focus his efforts on critiquing the many facets of public life, juxtaposing it with the private, and often revealing how the lines between both have become blurred in modernity and post-modernity. In doing so, Lasch spotlighted the "problems posed for authentic democracy. . . by the detachment of the new privileged classes, both physically and ideologically" (Beer, 2005, p. 330). By drawing from liberal and conservative perspectives and scholars, Lasch eventually identified populism as a potential cure for the ills of America's modern historical moment. His populism would inspire *The Culture of Narcissism*, which would, in turn, greatly influence President Carter's most famous speech.

Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech asserted that the nation's troubles throughout the 1970s ran deeper than energy, yet it was actually Carter's chief pollster, Pat Caddell, who first drew Carter's attention to this notion. Caddell had read *The Culture of Narcissism*, and agreed with Lasch that America's therapeutic mindset had led

to a diminishment in its faith in institutions and the future. Caddell advised Carter that Americans had “tuned him out” when it came to the energy issue (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 670). He insisted that a reason for this was the nation’s psyche, which proved a greater obstacle for Carter than “gasoline lines and double-digit inflation” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 672). Heeding Caddell’s words, Carter familiarized himself with Lasch’s critique of American society, and agreed.

Lasch (1979) had speculated that “the growth of bureaucracy, the cult of consumption with its immediate gratifications, [and] above all the severance of the sense of historical continuity” had transformed America from a nation subscribing to the Protestant work ethic to a nation under the weight of capitalism. From this emerged a desire only for the accumulation of wealth and a never-ceasing search for pleasure and survival (p. 86). By the 1970s, a neurotic paralysis had gripped the nation, and people turned to luxury as a balm for their anxiety. A consumerist mentality enabled a sense of “instant gratification,” while living only for the moment had become the highest aim in life (Gurstein, 2006, p. 18). Lasch contended that, as a result, a nation of children had found it difficult to grow up, difficult to recognize historical continuity, and difficult to sustain long-lasting relationships (Guerstein, 2006). Persuaded by this argument, Carter urged Americans to “face the truth” and to, once again, “have faith in the future of this nation” (Carter, 1979). Like children who rebel, however, Americans largely ignored Carter’s argument that their increasing reliance on self-help and comfort had decreased their lack of faith in the future and in the traditions of the past. Instead, they turned to Reagan, who opened the floodgates to the “now.”

To make clear how Lasch's critiques influenced Caddell and Carter, it is prudent to seek a glimpse into Lasch's intellectual move from the left to the middle, and even to right-of-middle. Strongly influenced by the works of Karl Marx, Lasch "remained unequivocally on the left" from the 1940s through the mid-1960s. (Horowitz, 2004, p. 211). However, Lasch began to pivot from supporting the political left and certain leftist presuppositions and preoccupations toward a "culturally conservative populism" that presupposed a need to nurture traditions, communities, and institutions (Beer, 2005, pp. 330, 332). He grew disillusioned with, what he called, the left's "pseudo-radicalism," in which 'only the children of privilege . . . could indulge' (Horowitz, 2004, p. 212). Yet, despite his rhetorical turn towards social conservatism and his annoyance with the postmodern left and its "complacent optimism," he never disavowed progressivism, Marxism, and other leftist influences (Beer, 2005, p. 333). He remained critical of capitalism, arguing that its continued growth "undermined the authenticity of human experience and fostered instead a devastating assault on restraint in the name of the pursuit of empty pleasure" (Horowitz, 2004, p. 212). Lasch would witness capitalism's continued assault on human restraint from the 1950s through the 1970s.

By this time, his vision of America was a tragic one in which humans were "almost solely fixated on affluence, which only stripped people of "sources of genuine satisfaction," creating a vacuum for narcissism to fill (Horowitz, 2004, p. 213). Lasch wrote that narcissism flowered during the 1970s, equating it to a mental illness that led to an age of diminished expectations (1979). Filling people's minds was an increasing sense that surviving life was, and would always be, a constant struggle and nothing more (Horowitz, 2004).

This line of thought is understandable. In the intervening years between the conclusion of World War II and the first energy crisis in 1973, the American people had experienced a series of shocks to their systems. Paradoxically, however, since the end of World War II, Americans had enjoyed the fruits of the burgeoning energy industry, namely bigger cars, bigger suburban homes, and bigger accumulations of items inside those homes. By the early 1970s, this way of life was now at risk and, as the decade progressed, many Americans feared its total collapse (Jacobs, 2017). Contributing to the nation's confusion and fear were the effects that energy manipulation and consumption were having on the environment.

On January 28, 1969, a massive oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, polluted an 800-square-mile section of the Pacific Ocean. The incident, for which Union Oil Company was responsible, led to a groundswell of grassroots environmental advocacy (Jacobs, 2017). A subsequent increase in pressure on the government resulted in the creation of the National Environmental Policy Act, designed to encourage harmony between man and the environment and to promote efforts to safeguard it (Jacobs, 2017). This was first in a list of efforts by the Nixon administration to bring awareness to the issue of environmental protection. Yet, a great irony emerged in that the "awareness of energy policy's importance did not lead to significant changes in the era's transportation or city planning" (Long, 2011, p. 348). American dependence on natural fossil fuels only grew stronger as did the country's hostility towards its government during the decade of the 70s (Jacobs, 2017).

Eventually, matters came to a head when inflation rose by 11 percent due to increasing oil prices in 1974 and unemployment rose to 8.3 percent in 1975 (Horowitz,

2005). With frustrations and anxieties running high, Americans started to suspect that wealthy oil companies were purposely withholding supplies in order to manipulate prices. They perceived the oil companies as “selfish corporate agents with little regard for workers, consumers, or the environment” (Jacobs, 2017, pp. 44–46). This was difficult to refute, given that “the companies were making record profits while the country’s economy skidded into recession” (Murphree and Aucoin, 2010, p. 8). Soon, people demanded further government intervention, which harkened back to the days prior to the New Deal (Jacobs, 2017).

The public’s demand for assistance led to a conflict among the oil corporations, the government, and the media. In response, Mobil Oil Corporation attempted to sway public opinion by launching a public relations effort against the national media, insinuating that the media had exacerbated the crisis and had unfairly placed the onus on the energy corporations (Murphree and Aucoin, 2010). The goal of this public relations effort was to “set the agenda for public debate on energy policy” (Murphree and Aucoin, 2010, p. 7). By confronting the national media, in particular *The New York Times* and CBS, Mobil pioneered a new, more aggressive public relations approach that influenced society and policy (Murphree and Aucoin, 2010). Mobil worked both to dispel public accusations that a conspiracy to manipulate prices existed and to dissuade the public’s call for government price controls and regulations (Murphree and Aucoin, 2010). The Nixon administration, meanwhile, attempted to appease both the public and the corporations.

However, President Nixon only added to the confusion of the situation by seemingly one day pushing for deregulation and the next day announcing the latest round

of environmental and price controls (Jacobs, 2017). With the Watergate scandal and Nixon's subsequent resignation in 1974, the nation's faith in its institutions was shaken even further. In penning *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), Lasch stated rather categorically, "Impending disaster has become an everyday concern, so commonplace and familiar that nobody any longer gives much thought to how disaster might be averted" (p. 12). Instead of uniting and rectifying the problems initiated by the World War II fallout, people, instead, concerned themselves with survival. They focused on finding ways to prolong life and ensure their physical and mental health (Lasch, 1979).

Thus, a "moral and psychological crisis" had enveloped American society and that its by-products were "hyper-individualism, selfishness, managerialism, hedonism, and rampant consumerism" (Kilminster, 2008, p. 132). Critics of Lasch's work pointed to the term "Narcissism" and mistook it to mean "selfishness"; however, Lasch framed narcissism as lacking a "strong sense of self" and failing to discern "boundaries between the self and its surroundings" (Gurstein, 2006, p. 14). Lasch also harshly critiqued "economic and political centralization and the technological rationality that sustained them" (Beer, 2005, p. 330), and determined to shed light on how our American institutions have gradually contributed to this mentality, creating a culture of individuals living in a perpetual state of anxiousness. In this way, Lasch had effectively captured the feeling associated with being alive during the 1970s (Gurstein, 2006).

Following the political turmoil of the 1960s, Americans "retreated to purely personal preoccupations," with no hope of improving their lives by themselves (Lasch, 1979, p. 13). To remedy this, people turned to forms of "psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly

dancing,” and other ritualistic activities (Lasch, 1979, p. 13). The therapeutic mindset effected American labor, coinciding with the deindustrialization of the auto and steel industries. By the mid-1970s, both blue- and white-collar job skills had been eroded, leaving behind personalities as the only labor power. As a result, “men and women alike [had] to project an attractive image and . . . become simultaneously role players and connoisseurs of their own performance” (Lasch, 1979, p. 92). Throughout the historical moment, narcissism spread rapidly and the individualized person emerged as a new commodity—a commodity that needed maintained through constant consumption and self-help. Instead of truth, people were spoon-fed information that was “neither true nor false but merely credible,” leaving them in world of “pseudo-events and quasi information” (Lasch, 1979, p. 75). From there, Americans became lulled into a state of “taken for granted expectations and assumptions” (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016, p. 35). Not having their expectations met only added to the sense of disappointment and lack of faith in the future, leaving people disconnected from the past and stranded in the present.

What remained was a “prevailing passion” to live primarily for the moment, not for one’s predecessors nor for posterity (Lasch, 1979, p. 13). This passion has rippled from the 1970s through today. While people contest that they consider future generations, their egos prohibit them from making any lasting changes beyond their own selfish needs. We, therefore, “are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future” (Lasch, 1979, p. 13). Rather, we are now in the process of either denying or trying to erase history. Ashamed of the failures of past generations, we now feel as though we have to pretend that those failures are not part of the narrative, that they did not exist. This puts

so little faith in future generations to discern what was good from what was not. We are embarrassed for not being the perfect society and the pandering to political interests make us hypocrites. The culture of narcissism has led to consequences whereby our corporations, headed by many a media expert, has transformed our society, destroying many of our traditions, including those work, relationship, and community related (Horowitz, 2004). Lasch eulogized the traditional work ethic as well as the power that guilt had in influencing our practices, while celebrating the rhetoric of figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Reinhold Neibuhr (Horowitz, 2004).

Thus, beginning in the late 1980s, Lasch sought a solution to the impasse of the Left-Right by arguing for a “reinvigoration of the populist tradition” (Beer, 2005, p. 339). It is clear why Carter was so influenced by Lasch, particularly, *The Culture of Narcissism*. Carter was an advocate of the populism that Lasch describes. Both he and Lasch emphasized virtue over self-interest, work over consumption and limitations over limitless self-fulfillment (Horowitz, 2004). By this time, though, Americans had already lost its faith in institutions, namely the government. Belief in a form of government must come with the understanding that there are no assurances (Johnstone, 1978). To believe in a democracy is to “have faith in the fundamental intelligence and goodness of ordinary people to govern themselves” (Johnstone, 1978, p. 241). Yet, by the mid-1960s, the governmental and mass media bureaucracies began usurping the faith of the American people. John F. Kennedy had once proclaimed the end of such ideologies that had been promulgated by dispassionate bipartisan experts only serving to confuse most Americans (Lasch, 1979). However, the vague rhetoric of these bureaucracies has only increased and only continues to provide misinformation to the public, thus making the public beholden

to the therapeutic mindset and preventing it from achieving true self-government (Lasch, 1979). Ultimately, this situation becomes what Arendt refers to as a “banality of evil,” whereby people do not, or cannot, contest destructive behaviors that result from thoughtless actions (Arnett, 2013).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the banality of evil manifested through the bureaucratization of corporations, media, and government, which led to a change in the social relations of production (Lasch, 1979). Lasch states, “For all his inner suffering, the narcissist has many traits that make for success in bureaucratic institutions . . .” (p. 57). This harkens to Arendt (1963) and her analysis of the bureaucrat. It is also a reason why argument and judgement are so important in a post-modern world. Lasch argued that we must not lose sight of our ability to judge and to argue viewpoints. These, he believed, were essential to a democratic society. Lasch believed that social critics must be subjected to judgement, and argument must flourish, for that is a primary means whereby true democracy flourishes (Elshtain, 1995). This also mirrors Arendt, who considered judgement to be “the most important of all the political faculties of the human mind” (Elshtain, 1995, p. 150). A key connection between Lasch and Carter is that both supported judgement and were keen to examine various viewpoints. This is evidenced in the days prior to the “Crisis” speech, whereby Carter held his domestic summit at Camp David, inviting judgement and argument from people in various walks of American public and private life. One of those individuals present was, of course, Christopher Lasch. Another, of course, was Daniel Bell, whose thoughts on the subject of judgement and examination mirrored Lasch’s. Throughout his career, Bell proved a keen judge of

American society. His famous publication during the years of the energy crisis would, just like Lasch's, influence Carter's most significant public speech.

Carter and Bell: A Speech's Exigence

Daniel Bell was born Daniel Bolotsky in Manhattan in 1919 to Eastern European immigrants. By the time he graduated from high school, Bell "was well grounded in the Socialist and Marxist canon and well aware of the leftist landscape" that had taken shape in the post-World War I/pre-World War II years (Kaufmann, 2011, par. 18). He would go on to a career as a scholar and social commentator in the same vein as Christopher Lasch and Reinhold Niebuhr. In his major works, he discussed "the failures of Socialism in America, the exhaustion of modern culture and the transformation of capitalism from an industrial-based system to one built on consumerism" (Kaufmann, 2011, par. 3). The last of these ideas would garner significant focus during the energy crisis years in the 1970s.

Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976) had a profound effect on those who grappled with the energy crisis and its consequences, including President Carter, who incorporated Bell's views into the "Crisis of Confidence" speech (Horowitz, 2004). Bell (1976) begins his critique of American society referring to the energy crisis, that it "exposed the vulnerability of the Western industrial societies" and that their dependence on oil arose out of their cheapness (p. 27). He then moves into discussing the contradictions emergent from within the capitalist economic model. Bell suggests that, in its infancy, capitalism "was originally tied to a legitimating culture and character structure, that of the bourgeois and his ethic of self-restraint" (Pooley, 2007, p. 402). However, hedonism and relativism soon clashed with, and somewhat replaced, the virtue of self-restraint, thereby instilling in workers a sense of instant gratification (Pooley,

2007). This plays out in American corporations, which, according to Bell, were social inventions created by three men: Theodore Vail at AT&T, Walter Teagle at Standard Oil, and Alfred Sloan at General Motors (Dowling, 1976). For Bell, the Protestant work ethic was killed, but it was not capitalism nor the corporations that did this; rather, mass production and consumption were the perpetrators (Dowling, 1976).

For Bell, this is one of the primary contradictions of capitalism. He offers in a 1976 interview that the corporation's subordination to the polity "is both necessary and desirable" (Dowling, 1976, p. 35). Yet, a contradiction emerged: a polity subordinate, and even dependent upon, the corporation. Further, the corporation expects not only subordination, but also devotion. It wants people to spend their careers within it, to work hard, and "delay their gratification, yet at the same time it is promoting hedonism in terms of products and savings" (Dowling, 1976, p. 40). Thus, there are increased demands on the government to provide direct allocations of the resources that fail to be allocated through the corporations (Dowling, 1976). Bell points to the 1960s as the decade whereby a "culture of self-fulfillment," had triumphed over "religious virtues," and "pop hedonism" had replaced guilt with anxiety (Horowitz, 2004, p. 208). As a result, the state was increasingly required to placate both individual and collective ends (Horowitz, 2004). This ran counter to Carter's belief that government was finite in its abilities to solve all of Americans' problems. Yet, the people's increasing dependence on government caused, according to Bell, a crumbling of national values.

The erosion of American values took place on two levels: 1) culture and ideas, and 2) social structure (1976). Specifically, a change in motivations and rewards in our economic system occurred. The rising of wealth in the plutocracy (initiated in the Gilded

Age) led to an emphasis on consumption and a display of wares, whereby “status and badges, not work and the election of God, became the mark of success” (Bell, 1976, p. 74). This idea mirrors Carter’s assessment in the “Crisis of Confidence” speech that people are “no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns” (Carter, 1979). In essence, our American capitalist system had, decades previously, introduced abundance to the public and had gradually encouraged prodigality instead of prudence (Bell, 1976).

Here Bell and Lasch converge, given that, for Lasch (1979), such encouragement inevitably destroys all institutions except for the individual. As a result, the individual is left to face a myriad of contradictions. Bell identified three that, guided by opposing or contrasting principles, created conflicts which threatened the overall health of American society: 1) “The techno-economic, ruled by rationality, efficiency, and economizing,” 2) “The polity,” whereby claims to equality and justice had created a sense of entitlement among citizens, 3) “The culture,” which pursued meaning in expressive forms (Horowitz, 2004, p. 207). Bell argued that the clashing of ideologies between these three areas had, by the 1970s, pushed the nation to its breaking point (Horowitz, 2004). He further insisted, and appeared to lament, that America had become fixated on the “new,” which had led to the rise of a “cult of artistic creativity,” an “emphasis on spontaneity,” and the “demise of the small town” (Horowitz, 2004, p. 208). Gradually, the individual grows increasingly focused on the self, while pulling away from society and from traditions and connections that promote meaning.

Bell suggests that this self-absorption removes the resources we need to live a meaningful life, and that modernity promotes instability, which “renders legitimation and

social order very difficult to maintain” (Pooley, 2007, p. 402). This can be traced to the nineteenth century, which saw an “increase in mobility, the growth of cities, and the breakdown of small-town life” (Pooley, 2007, p. 405). An emphasis on the new emerged at the expense of traditions, and our impressions of time and space became disoriented (Pooley, 2007). While our capitalist system encourages hard work and career pursuits, it also advocates pleasure, relaxation, and instant gratification, stimulated by our advertising and marketing industries (Bell, 1976). This is evident in our energy use and consumption since the 1970s. Since George H.W. Bush left office in 1992, the trend is for consumption to increase whenever prices in energy drop. As energy prices soar, we cut back. While we ride up and down on this economic yo-yo, our energy problems and dependence on products and luxury items remain while our futures remain unpredictable (Jacobs, 2016).

Yet, our dependence on products and luxury items remain. For instance, the late 1990s featured the rise of sport utility vehicles, which were exempt from C.A.F.E. (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standards. By 2002, these vehicles made up roughly one quarter of the domestic car market (Graetz, 2011), and by 2005 Americans drove nearly three times the number of miles they had thirty years previously (Jacobs, 2016). Evidently, the dominant cultural mindset of twenty-first century America equates material wealth with prosperity (Jayachandiran et al., 2016). The acquisition of wealth activates a belief in our ability to control our lives, thus influencing the way in which we interpret our existence (Sharma, 2014). Tighter cycles of production cause dysfunctional behavior that push towards therapeutic solutions often manifested through personal technologies that transform us into “cyborg-consumer-citizens” (Sharma, 2014, p. 4).

Unlike the 1970s, however, the effects today are exacerbated by the element of speed, particularly in the workplace (Sharma, 2014, p. 30). This tendency for increased speed creeps in to all aspects of our lives through advertisements, our technological devices, and the literature that we read (Sharma, 2014).

Because of these contradictions, humans struggle to achieve any semblance of a true identity (Pooley, 2007). Further, it is from these contradictions that Capitalism will, according to Bell, eventually breakdown (Pooley, 2007). Bell suggests solutions, however, specifically: 1) “a return to religion,” and 2) “a spontaneous willingness to make sacrifices for the public good” (Horowitz, 2004, p. 210). Despite the suggested solutions that Bell offers us, he remains, largely, quite pessimistic and, as Horowitz (2004) describes “almost apocalyptic” (p. 207). The problem lay with the American entitlement society, those of any group who called upon the government to meet both their needs and their wants (Horowitz, 2004). With these rising demands, a world of limited resources could only lead, inevitably, to an overloading of the political system. In other words, Culture has become too destructive and has undermined the economy and the polity (Horowitz, 2004). It is here that our bonds between us and our institutions become broken, thereby leaving us rudderless. Both Lasch and Bell draw our attention to our excessive reliance on the state, and the resultant taxing of the state’s limited resources. Carter drew heavily upon the themes in Bell’s work, and strove to impress them upon the nation. He emphasized on several occasions, not only during the “Crisis” speech, the people’s tendency to demand more from the government, and the government’s limitations in meeting those demands. Further, Carter’s attention to international affairs, his determination to create a balance of harmony between the United

States and the other nations of the world, suggests he foresaw Bell's (1976) warning that the events of the 1970s revealed "a failure of political will to match economic urgencies" (p. 28). This only suggested an imbalance and an instability of the international order, one that Carter struggled to rectify (Bell, 1976). As with Niebuhr and Lasch, Carter's connection to Bell is substantial and his actions indicative of the dilemmas that Bell pointed to.

Niebuhr, Lasch, and Bell all illustrate the problems that plagued the 1970s and, more specifically, the Carter presidency. Robert Bellah, another substantial intellectual figure of that historical moment offered possible solutions to the problems, solutions that Carter attempted to implement in 1979.

Carter and Bellah: A Speech's Solution

Born February 23, 1927 in Altus, Oklahoma, Robert Bellah shared with both Niebuhr and Lasch a Midwestern American's background. Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, he would go on to become one of America's foremost Protestant thinkers and scholars (Stahl, 2015). Bellah's scholarly focus during his peak years was religion, and he viewed "the diversity and coherence of religion as the key to culture across civilizations" (Tipton, 2013, p. 12). Early on, he focused primarily on foreign cultures, but shifted his attentions toward American and Western cultures, beginning with his 1967 essay, "Civil Religion in America" (Stahl, 2015). With this, he began to engage both America and the West, considering them "problematic cases that can be understood only in the broadest comparative perspective" (Tipton, 2013, p. 12). He determined to ascertain how religion fit within these perspectives and how it propelled the societies of both.

In America, specifically, religion was under duress during the middle to late twentieth-century, given the nation had been embroiled in roughly half a century's worth of war, from World War I through World War II, to the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. In the midst of the latter, *Time Magazine* published a 1966 article proclaiming rather boldly, "God is dead." This apparent turn toward atheistic sentiment only sharpened Bellah's focus on religion, specifically, civil religion (Stahl, 2015). He argued at the time that many were not aware of the existence of civil religion, which he posited was "shaped by biblical symbols and mythic themes . . . but interpreted broadly to accommodate Catholics and Jews in keeping with the reigning religio-political beliefs and values" (Bellah, 1967, 2005; Roof, 2009, p. 297). For Bellah, civil religion was both "concurrent with and distinct from the religion of the church and synagogue" (Stahl, 2015, p. 444). Throughout his work, he also addressed the controversy that civil religion had created in America, that it generated an assumption of only one religion, and that religion itself is non-existent outside of the church, synagogue, and other church settings (Stahl, 2015). Further, Bellah (1967; 2005) argued that, while many considered the idea of American religion a good thing in general, few tended to care about it to any great degree.

Bellah insisted that the issue was worth pursuing, however, because it raised "the issue of how civil religion relates to the political society, on the one hand, and to private religious organization, on the other" (1967; 2005, p. 42). In pursuing the issue, therefore, it is prudent to distinguish between "public religion" and "civil religion." According to Roof (2009), "Whereas the latter concept conveys an image of a watered-down religious unity, the former sensitizes us to the fact that various religious constituencies seek to

advance a collective story for the nation” (p. 298). America’s civil religious heritage is more a cultural entity, whereby “appropriations of particular myths, beliefs, symbols, stories, and ritual practices” are assimilated in an attempt to unify individuals and larger groups (Roof, 2009, p. 297). Turning to, Bellah’s article, “Human Conditions for a Good Society” (1979; 2005), he offers two “partly incompatible” models of the relation between individuals and society as a whole. Both are rooted deeply in the American tradition.

The first model is the covenant, which is “based on unlimited promise involving care and concern for others under divine law and judgment (Bellah, 1979, 2005, p. 73). The other model is the contract, whereby “people join together to maximize self-interest. These people remain joined only provided they receive a payoff for their efforts” (Bellah, 1979, 2005, p. 73). Bellah suggests that the covenant model is rooted in Biblical tradition while the contract model is rooted in the market. To extrapolate this idea further, it could be said that the covenant model is embedded within a narrative, while the contract model is embedded within the individual. Therefore, a move is made from maintaining faith in an institutional narrative to investing our faith in what Hannah Arendt might have referred to as bureaucrats and experts (Arnett, 2013). It is Arendt (1951) who, further, determined that such a move opens the door to totalitarianism.

Individualism risks the total loss of our understanding and awareness of our covenant tradition (Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007). This notion comes from de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, in which he provides a thorough analysis of individualism, that it involves humans isolating themselves from the masses. It differs from selfishness in that it does not involve hording “for one’s own purposes,” rather

people determine to “stand above the fray” and judge the rest of society (Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007, p. 118). As individuals judge, often out of seemingly good intentions, they create unforeseen communicative crises out of a “universal assurance of rationality” (Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007, p. 119). While these crises emerge in various manifestations, humanity disregards traditions and focuses almost singularly on efficiency, progress, and newness to combat them (Arnett, Fritz, and Holba, 2007).

Counter to this practice, Bellah advocated for a return to “civil religion”—a commitment to our shared values and commitments to the community and the common good (Harrington, 1987, p. 61). Throughout the 1970s, Bellah commented on what he and others determined was a “lack of community bonds . . . the constant dissolving of national social goals . . . the enhancement of individual power by science,” and the exploitation of nature through the technological developments of machines (Harrington, 1987, p. 60). Bellah uses the term “religion” as opposed to “morality” due to the latter’s implying a “stronger, more active, more serious commitment” than the former (Harrington, 1987, p. 61). This speaks to Carter’s belief that practices motivated by faith could better society. In addition, for him, individualism contributed to “a growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation” (Carter, 1979). He recognized that Americans often missed the mark when it comes to maintaining a “sense of humility, sacrifice, and recognition of the country’s own transgressions and shortcomings” (Berggren, 2005, p. 47). Carter attempted to instill this sense into the hearts of the American people when he referred to America as “the most wasteful nation on earth” (Carter 1977). He had consistently maintained, ever since his inaugural address, that government has limits and cannot solve everyone’s problems.

Instead, the nation must sacrifice and do its best for the common good (Carter, 1977). In this, Carter invoked Levinas's concept of the third (Arnett, 2017) which mirrors the Catholic Communion of Saints (Arnett?). The idea that there is three—a beginning, middle, and end; a past, present, and future. Carter alluded to this in his proposed energy policy, stating that the energy issue was significant because “more waste [had] occurred, and more time [had] passed by without our planning for the future.” (Carter, 1977). He knew that, out of this cycle, corruption emerged.

Bellah (1979, 2005) argues that corruption is found in “luxury, dependence, and ignorance” and, eventually, leads to an acceptance of such dependence upon various governmental and private corporate structures that promise they will care for people's material needs (p. 74). Corruption in this form is coveting personal “goods,” rather than contributing to a common good; it is this corruption that ultimately destroys republics (Bellah, 1979, 2005). In the end, having lost confidence in society and its institutions during the 1960s and 1970s, the American people put their faith into Reagan, the great presidential therapist, who simply pointed the way to the market. A different solution might have presented itself through an acknowledgment that endless economic growth was not the answer to all of people's problems (Bellah, 1979, 2005). At least, this was an idea that Carter had attempted to impress upon the country. Clearly, it went in a different direction, and the ripple effect of that decision is still felt today as the country grows increasingly more engaged in practices of consumption.

Therefore, what does Bellah see as a solution? His hope is for Americans to turn away from individualism and its preoccupation with science, progress, and newness, and towards a sense of collective humanity. He hopes for a life that does not stifle science,

but does not deify it either (Harrington, 1987, p. 63). Carter, too, hoped that this sense of unity among Americans would help to end the crisis of confidence that plagued the nation, stating:

The confidence that we have always had as a people is not simply some romantic dream or a proverb in a dusty book that we read just on the Fourth of July. It is the idea that founded our nation and has guided our development as a people. (Carter, 1979)

To achieve a fresh sense of confidence, the American people, drawing again from Bellah, must continue to understand that our traditions and covenants are imperfect, become broken, and must continually be chosen.

Bellah (1992) writes, “Always in the background and occasionally in the foreground [is] the notion that the world itself is in need of reform and rebirth” (p. 10). He further designates a particular aspect of reality that people *must* face: that covenants are inevitably broken at one point or another (Arnett, 2010). This is often due to the duplicitous nature of humanity in which “the best and the worst in society or an individual are often closely related” (Bellah, 1992, p. 63). There is often a fine line between how we behave and how we respond to our and others’ behaviors. Americans responded to the energy crisis of the 1970s by failing to acknowledge its predilection for individualism and, instead, embracing neo-liberal capitalism. We are now experiencing many ill effects of that choice. However, we now have a choice in how we respond to the issues of today’s historical moment. We can accept the tenuous nature of an uncertain outcome and, despite the understanding that nothing is certain, can “roll up [our] sleeves and work to right problematic issues” with the knowledge that the task may never be

completed (Arnett, 2010, p. 231). An appreciation of the work that is involved in attempting to restore a broken covenant is essential (Arnett, 2010). Otherwise, we attempt to manipulate and control our certainties, attempting to create an existence out of the sum of our collected objects (Arnett, 2010).

The problem is not that we need to be rid of control, but finding a new manner of control that will allow for a greater freedom within the institution (Bellah, 1992). Bellah insists that a recognition of a broken covenant does not suggest a rejection of an institution's past. Rather, it reaffirms the need for institutions' members to accept that they are not innocent nor are they the saviors of humankind. Therefore, together, we must "pick up the broken pieces [and try] to start again. . . That too is part of our tradition" (Bellah, 1992, pp. 141-142). This tenant has been and will continue to prove useful for communication scholars, as we attempt to navigate current and future historical moment that witness a seemingly constant barrage of broken covenants.

Jimmy Carter entered office during a time in which the covenant between the nation's most visible leader and its people had been practically obliterated, let alone broken. A country that had taken for granted the integrity of men elected to the highest office in the land, was forced to witness the unravelling of that office during the Watergate scandal. The resultant resignation of Richard Nixon, along with his subsequent pardoning by Gerald Ford, only deepened America's wounds. Carter, sensing the need for national healing, took a cue from Bellah and acknowledged the failings of the past—Vietnam and Watergate—in an attempt to help pick up the pieces and start again. Carter faced the broken covenant head-on, unlike his successor, Ronald Reagan, who suggested a different narrative, assuring the nation "that the Vietnam War was noble rather than

appalling, that Watergate was forgotten, that racial conflict was a thing of the distant past, and that the U.S. economy still offered the American dream” (Miroff, 2014, pp. 237-238). Despite Carter’s defeat in the 1980 election, he more closely aligned with Bellah’s perspective than did Reagan and, at the very least, left us with an enduring example of presidential leadership undergirded by integrity.

Conclusion

Jimmy Carter’s presidency is a testament to the work of Niebuhr, Lasch, Bell, and Bellah, and should offer communication ethics scholars, educators, and students a firm example of how American presidents can attempt to unify a nation using faith and hope as a springboard. Reinhold Niebuhr (1961) wrote that human beings are children of nature, driven by our base impulses, both good and bad, and are physically confined to the years of life that we have on this earth. He argued that our “varied organic form” allows us some, but not too much, latitude in this situation (p. 3). He also acknowledged that the nature of humans, as both physical and spiritual, is paradoxical, that we are both unique and separate in our individuality and tethered to and dependent upon a connection with the “divine and the eternal” (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 4). Therefore, when we humans place ourselves above, or separate ourselves from our divine connection, we tend to lose our way and must “must recover a sense of purpose and direction” (Lasch, 1991, p. 23). President Carter believed that the nation, by the late 1970s, *had* lost its way and needed to reclaim its sense of purpose through a realignment with faith-driven practices.

Yet, Carter remained hopeful for the future, not optimistic, and it is important to distinguish the two. In doing so, we can find that hope can be a more dependable navigator through troubled times than merely an optimistic belief in progress (Lasch,

1991). In *The True and Only Heaven* (1991), Lasch sets populism against progressive optimism, arguing that the latter denies the “natural limits on human power and freedom, and it cannot survive for very long in a world in which an awareness of those limits has become inescapable” (p. 530). Lasch’s focus on limits was critical to his latter scholarship, and intersects with Carter’s more conservative stance on the limits of government to provide for citizens’ wants. It is from an understanding of our limits that hope emerges and enables us to strive higher, knowing that we may never reach our target. In this, we obtain what Lasch calls “a more vigorous form of hope,” that enables us to understand the dualities of life, the good and the bad (Lasch, 1991, p. 530). Only through this understanding can we come to see optimism revealed “as a higher form of wishful thinking” (Lasch, 1991, p. 530). This outlook on hope and faith circles around to the concept of justice, which fuses the ideas of Carter, Lasch, and Niebuhr.

Specifically, it ties together hope *and* justice. For, if politics is an attempt to achieve justice in a sinful world, then hope demands a certain belief in justice. President Carter believed in justice, therefore, he remained hopeful that it could be achieved. Further, he engaged in tenacious hope (Arnett, 2015), by diving into the pile and attempting to fix what he believed ailed the nation at the time. He sided with Lasch, Bellah, and Bell that the nation had turned to new practices motivated by self-fulfillment and individualism and had turned away from its national traditions of commitment to a common, national purpose. For Carter, hope in the nation’s future was not dependent upon progress, but justice. Yet, he also embodied Lasch’s (1991) assertion that hope implies a deeply rooted trust in life and a confidence in the past perhaps even more than the future. For it is through an understanding of the beginnings of our institutions that we

gain an appreciation for the “why” behind our rhetorical and ethical practices. All that said, perhaps the strongest correlation between President Carter and Niebuhr lay in the latter’s assertion that the most essential aspect to political life is how one deals with failure, not victory (Maier, 2018). Carter has proven, particularly given his achievements post-presidential disappointment, a worthy example of Niebuhrian leadership.

Carter’s communication ethic with regard to American society is argued here as tenacious hope motivated by faith, and embodied through civil religion. Students of communication ethics and presidential leadership should turn to Carter’s handling of the “Crisis of Confidence,” to understand his ethic and draw an important distinction between a president’s exigence and his outcomes—that though the latter may not yield the most bountiful harvest, the seeds may still be worth salvaging. In other words, though Carter’s presidency and his designs for our ethical future gave way to a new direction under President Reagan, there are still significant lessons that Carter’s words can teach us, particularly regarding the choice between “working together with a common faith” and following a path of “fragmentation and self-interest” (Carter, 1979). Carter argued that the latter path leads to a “mistaken idea of freedom, the right to grasp for ourselves some advantage over others. . . . It is a certain route to failure” (Carter, 1979). As we move further into the twenty-first century, we might reflect on those words, and look for tendencies that suggest America is, unfortunately, moving down that second path.

The following chapter will address those tendencies as it presents the “Crisis of Confidence” speech and offers a detailed study of its message, as well as Carter’s style and delivery. In addition, reactions to the address will be discussed, specifically, those of

Christopher Lasch, Daniel Bell, and Robert Bellah, indicating how close Carter came (in their minds) to interpreting their scholarship accurately.

Chapter 3: A Detailed Reading of the “Crisis of Confidence” Speech and an Analysis of Presidential Leadership

Introduction

In chapter one of Theodore Lowi’s *The Personal President* (1985), Lowi details a scene in which FDR gathered together a group of public administration experts and tasked them with offering recommendations for how to manage his newly created New Deal policies. The first sentence of the report given to FDR “fired a shot heard round the Washington world ever since: *The President needs help*” (Lowi, 1985, p. 1). Help is also a theme in Carter’s “Crisis” speech, as he plainly confessed to the viewing audience: *I realize more than ever that as President I need your help* (Carter, 1979). It is not common for presidents to admit vulnerability to the American people, yet Carter’s concession firmly established his role as American public servant rather than leader of the free world. Additionally, and maybe more importantly, the context from which Carter engaged his audience raises an important question for rhetorical critics to answer—in which genre of presidential address *might* Carter’s speech belong? In examining potential classifications of presidential rhetoric for Carter’s speech, a fine line must be trodden between classifying and clarifying. Ultimately, clarification is the purpose here, since that remains the overall purpose of genre analysis (Frye, 2000). We must not make the mistake of simply pigeonholing Carter’s address for risk of oversimplification and misrepresentation.

On one hand, the “Crisis of Confidence” speech could be considered a sermon of sorts, in that it was “a confession of sinfulness . . . a decision [of Carter’s] to commit himself and the nation to a battle against sin . . . and a claim of rebirth for himself and for

America” (Horowitz, 2005, pp. 24-25). It was also, perhaps, the most sustained attack against affluence ever demonstrated in a presidential address, as well as Carter’s most affective display of rhetorical leadership (Horowitz, 2005). Blakesley (1995) categorizes Carter as an analytical leader who often appeared ill at ease when dealing face to face with others, and that his preference for analytics often precluded him from effectively selling his ideas to the nation. This was not the case here. Quite the contrary, in fact, as Carter engaged the nation with restrained yet firm emotional weight. Despite Carter’s rhetorical heft, however, the speech became marked as rhetoric of malaise. As will be discussed in this chapter, “malaise” is simply a narrow and incorrect designation. Truth be told, even the title, “Crisis of Confidence” is a slight misnomer. The official title of the speech is “Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals.” Perhaps the rather innocuous and lengthy title earned the speech its subsequent nicknames. After all, “Crisis of Confidence” and “Malaise Speech” more effectively sensationalizes the subject matter. However, whatever the name for Carter’s speech, it is the creation, the content, and the delivery that garner rhetorical significance.

By analyzing the aforementioned qualities of the speech, this chapter will attempt to clarify into which genres of presidential address the speech may fit. To do this, the speech’s origins will be discussed, as will the manner in which Carter incorporated thematic elements that he gathered from others to make the speech uniquely his own. A detailed study of the content of the speech will be presented, specifically, those sections that utilize Christopher Lasch’s, Robert Bellah’s, and Daniel Bell’s scholarship. Analysis of Carter’s style, delivery, and the effectiveness of both will follow. Lastly, the chapter will present Christopher Lasch’s, Robert Bellah’s, and Daniel Bell’s reactions to the

speech, as well as the reactions of the media and the public in an effort to properly contextualize Carter's display of presidential leadership. The argument is that Jimmy Carter exhibited traits of a strong leader during a time of crisis, despite popular criticism and even certain evidence to suggest otherwise. While "malaise" became an often-used classifier for the speech, there are other designations into which it more appropriately fits.

A Review of Genre Criticism

Criticism and classification are certainly nothing new to rhetoric. The lineage originates from Aristotle, who parsed rhetoric into deliberative, forensic, and epideictic categories (Jamieson, 1973, p. 162). Baird and Thonssen (1947) remind us also that, in addition to Aristotle, the ancient Greeks and Romans in general, most notably Plato, Cicero, and Quintilian, regularly practiced oratory criticism. They "not only formulated principles of composition and of presentation, but recorded at length their judgement of contemporary speechmakers" (Baird and Thonssen, 1947, p. 134). With this in mind, an attempt to judge Carter's rhetoric will be undertaken. Yet, before stepping into an analysis of the "Crisis of Confidence" speech, we must attempt to ascertain the reasons for pursuing this task in first place. Therefore, a first question to ask is: *why analyze public address?*

Baird and Thonssen's "Methodology in the Criticism of Public Address" (1947) makes it clear that the purpose of rhetorical criticism:

Is to express a judgement on a public speech; that such judicial appraisal is a derivative of composite judgments formulated by reference to the methodologies of rhetoric, history, sociology, and social psychology, logic, and philosophy; and

that the materials and techniques of experimental science require these other evaluative agencies in any satisfactory appraisal of public address. (p. 134)

Given this reasoning, a two-part, follow-up question is why should Jimmy Carter's rhetoric be studied, and why this particular speech? The "Crisis of Confidence" speech, in general, is typically not mentioned among the greatest presidential addresses in American history, nor is it ranked very high on critical lists in which it does appear. In 2018, History.com unveiled its list of 10 Modern Day Speeches Every American Should Know (McNearney, 2018). The list included two speeches from FDR, two from Eisenhower, two from Reagan, and one each from JFK, Lyndon Johnson, and George W. Bush. Carter's speech is not among them. While the speech is included in American Rhetoric's Top 100 Speeches list, it ranks eighty-eighth ("American Rhetoric"). On a list of the Top 100 American Speeches compiled by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Texas A&M, and reflecting the opinions of 137 scholars in American public address, Carter's speech ranks ninetieth ("Top 100 American Speeches").

Therefore, we arrive at a third question as it pertains to Carter's speech. *Was* it a memorable and significant speech and, if so, *why* (Baird and Thonssen, 1947, p. 134)? The short answer is "yes." The "Crisis of Confidence" address, when viewed through the lens of communication ethics and civil discourse, was one of the most timely and direct presidential speeches of the latter twentieth-century. Carter addressed the nation with a gumption that belied his soft-spoken manner. In this way, he embodied what David W. Noble referred to as a "Jerimiad" (Carpenter, 1978, p. 103; Noble, 1965), which will be elaborated on at a later point in the chapter. First, though, in answering each of these

three questions, it is prudent to begin with a review of genre criticism and some of its most important scholars.

In his analysis of speech genres, Bakhtin (1986) focuses on three aspects—thematic content, style, and compositional structure—as being linked “to the whole of the utterance”; these aspects are “equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication” (p. 60). Speech genres subsequently form from an amassing of utterances within each sphere in which language is used (Bakhtin, 1986). Meanwhile, Walter Fisher (1980) begins by asking some fundamental questions about genre criticism, namely, “What is a genre? How are genres constituted? How are genres manifested in specific rhetorical criticisms? And what are the ways in which genres contribute to the tasks of rhetorical criticism?” (p. 290). Bitzer (1968) defines genre as a “word borrowed from the French” that “signifies a distinct species, form, type, or kind” (p. 2; Jamieson, 1973, p. 162). Like Bitzer, Fisher also suggests that a genre is, simply, “a category,” which is “an Aristotelian, not a Platonic construct” (1980, p. 291). Moving further into his analysis, he posits four specific levels of genre:

- 1) Broad categories of discourse—poetic, dialectic, and rhetoric.
- 2) Classifications within the categories of poetic, dialectic, and rhetoric (comedy and tragedy for poetic; philosophical discourse for dialectic; place, style, aims, and motives for rhetoric).
- 3) Classifications of discourse within the categories sketched under the discussion of second level genre (sonnet, sestet, and ballad; theatre of the absurd; domestic tragedy).
- 4) Categories of discourse represented in terms of style. (1980, p. 292)

Fisher also acknowledges the importance of genre criticism, that it helps to shape history, and that specific generic criticisms ultimately “determine the character of specific acts of criticism” as well as a speech’s causes and effects (1980, p. 290). For instance, “if a speech is defined as a deliberative address composed of ethos, pathos, and pistis, the critic will see and appraise these modes of proof” (p. 290). For Fisher (1980), genres are constituted variously, based on how the critic interprets the speech and the speechmaker.

In contrast to Fisher’s more positive outlook on genre criticism, Conley (1979) addresses some of the practice’s problems, beginning with genre’s basic functioning. He suggests that, rather than the speaker, the audience actually dictates the terms of the speech. According to Conley, audiences expect speakers to conform to their “generic rules,” and expect the speaker’s solutions to a given problem to be “novel as well as fitting” (1979, p. 48). In other words, audiences expect speakers to give them what they *want* to hear. When speakers fail in an audience’s eyes, critics judge the speaker on that basis. For Conley, this derives from Aristotle, who recognized that “speakers in different situations must address different issues and hence will give different kinds of speeches” (1979, p. 47). Therefore, genre criticism is limited in nature, since it “must always stand in external relation to the work under consideration” (Conley, 1979, p. 49). Still, despite his analysis, Conley (1979) acknowledges the attractiveness of genre criticism, given its ability to allow critics to explain how and why a given speech has a certain affect, and to compare it to other speeches within similar classes.

Like Fisher, Jamieson (1973) also posits three of her own fundamental questions regarding genre: “Why do genres form?” How does genre affect rhetor and critic? What is the function of generic criticism?” (p. 162). Like Conley, she also points to a problem

with genre criticism, that by isolating genres into categories (such as author and period of production), speeches with inherently similar content, themes, and messages are therefore also isolated (1973). We can see this with the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, for the address is difficult to categorize due to its multi-faceted construction. As a starting point, we would presume to place it under the rather wide umbrella of “presidential address” but, from there, what would the exact sub-genre be?

Branham and Pearce (1996) suggest a “conversational” form of public address, in which a certain number or a totality of audience members are embraced as intimate objects of the speaker. Arguably, Carter approached the speech in this manner, beginning with a simple “Good Evening,” rather than the more formal and often more customary “my fellow Americans,” which Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Bill Clinton, and other presidents began many a speech (“Famous Presidential Speeches”). This kind of “collaborative rhetoric” was made popular by FDR and his Fireside Chats. Like Carter’s “Good Evening” salutation, FDR addressed the listening audience in a similar tone in seven of the thirty total addresses of this kind. Interestingly, the first thirteen chats began with no salutation at all. Of those that did, five began with, “My friends.” One chat began, “My fellow Americans and my friends.” Eight chats began more formally with, “My fellow Americans,” and the final address began simply, “Ladies and Gentlemen” (“Famous Presidential Speeches”). However, according to Branham and Pearce (1996), FDR’s Fireside Chat style of address also “masked and supported perhaps the greatest concentration of power in the history of the American presidency” (p. 427). Their perspective suggests why presidential addresses are difficult to classify beyond the obvious.

Jamieson (1973) puts forth the State of the Union and the Presidential Inaugural as two of the more obvious classifications of presidential address, and that, together, they help formulate a kind of institutional genre, since “establishment and maintenance of definable institutional forms of rhetoric serve to define the institution itself” (p. 165). Not only do forms of presidential address such as these help to define an institution, but they also perpetuate and insulate the institution, thereby guaranteeing a sense of continuity and a maintaining of the institution’s identity across the centuries (Jamieson, 1973).

Yet, during the time in which Carter was in office, the institution of president was undergoing a transformation. Its covenant had been broken, and Carter had attempted to alter its identity. Interestingly, in giving way to Reagan in 1980, Carter’s path to transformation was blocked. Thus, Reagan, the “Great Communicator,” transformed it in a different way that, perhaps, Carter had intended, creating a certain expectation for the office that future presidents have attempted to meet (Jamieson, 1973). However, “The ‘Teflon-like’ nature of Reagan’s rhetoric derived from his appropriation of three discourses: populism, the ‘National Security’ discourse, and ‘civil religion.’ One common element among these discourses is that they provide no legitimate position for opposition” (Branham and Pearce, 1996, p. 435; Weiler and Pearce, 1992, pp. 11-42). While Reagan was hailed as “The Great Communicator,” a more apt designation might be “The Great Persuader” since his pathos stymied the opposition, making it difficult to counter the optimism in Reagan’s rhetoric. Yet, that is an argument for another time.

Important to recognize here, is that a speaker’s rhetoric is colored by the role played for any specific occasion (Jamieson, 1973). We can ask what role Carter assumed when giving his “Crisis” address—preacher, leader, servant, or some other designation or

combination. Crisis manager is possible, given the weight of the energy crisis as a cause for the address in the first place. However, another possible role is that of Jeremiad. Carpenter (1978) informs us that Jeremiads were similar to “Puritan theologians of the second half of the seventeenth century, [who] ‘accepted the burden of warning the people’ who would stray from the ‘purity and simplicity’ of the New World” (pp. 103-104; Noble, 1965, pp. 3-4). Jeremiads warned that atonements for previous missteps must be made. Otherwise, dire consequences would befall anyone who failed to follow suit (Carpenter, 1978). Indeed, there is often a sense of “urgency and impending doom” in these kinds of rhetorical addresses, not too dissimilar from the tone of Carter’s “Crisis” address. Yet, the point of the Jeremiad is to persuade others to act, to better themselves, and to assume new practices. This is in direct reflection of Carter’s words: “It is the truth, and it is a warning” (Carter, 1979). The urgency of such a message corresponds to the perception on the part of the audience that they are a chosen people who must return to a more traditional thought-process that established themselves as chosen in the first place (Carpenter, 1978). If we are to presume Jeremiad as Carter’s assumed role, we must next examine his audience’s response to such a role, whether Carter met the expectations of the audience, and whether those expectations may have been exceedingly harsh.

Analyzing “Crisis of Confidence”: A Speech’s Expectations

The focus of inquiry in this section will be interpretation and evaluation of speeches as productions, for the decided task at hand is to extract “the facts and relationships brought to light by the analytic and synthetic procedures; and [accept] responsibility for estimating the worth of the production” (Baird and Thonssen, 1947, p. 135). In other words, Carter’s speech will be considered an art form within the wide

genre of rhetoric, and it will be judged from a qualitative position in the hope of discovering “a well-defined reflective pattern” of expression and reception (Baird and Thonssen, 1947, p. 135). Utilizing rhetoric, history, logic, and philosophy (Baird and Thonssen, 1947), the hope is in revealing a greater relevance of the “Crisis of Confidence” speech within the canon of presidential rhetoric. Regarding rhetoric, “its aim of social control,” in this case, Carter’s intent to persuade his audience will be evaluated according to his ability and intent to transfer the meaning of his words to his audience (Baird and Thonssen, 1947, p. 136). As for history, Carter’s “methods for thinking” and his “modes of expression” will be analyzed based on his background and history, and his personality as a speaker (Baird and Thonssen, 1947, p. 137). Next, Carter’s intellectual methods for speaking will be evaluated in an attempt to develop a logical connection between Carter’s speech and the evaluative methods used (Baird and Thonssen, 1947). Lastly, we will arrive at an interpretation of the analysis of Carter’s personality, the attitudes of the audience toward the speech, and to how the speech affected the overall national community and trends (Baird and Thonssen, 1947). The hope is that, by utilizing generalizations pertaining to speaker, speech, audience, and occasion, we may provide a proper context for analysis (Baird and Thonssen, 1947).

Speechmakers are often restricted by traditional forms of message encapsulation as well as generic classifications constructed by audiences and critics “in perceiving and evaluating the critical object” (Jamieson, 1973, p. 166). Here is where Carter may have gone against the grain and, in doing so, broke the unwritten rules of presidential rhetoric. Jamieson (1973) suggests the existence of an “implied contract” between a speaker and the audience, and a stipulation that the speaker “fulfill rather than frustrate the

expectations created for the audience by previous rhetoric generated in response to similar situations” (p. 167). Therefore, what were the nation’s expectations for the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, and what did Carter provide? To answer this, we must step back and examine the crafting of the address itself.

The seeds for what became President Carter’s speech were sown during his “domestic summit” at Camp David in the summer of 1979. During this time, he “channeled the discussions beyond the subjects of energy and economics to the larger question of the nature of the leadership he and his administration [were] providing” (Tulis, 2017, p. 3; Washington Post, 1979, p. 1). Once Carter departed from Camp David, he set about designing an address that, he hoped, would restore the American peoples’ faith in government and its institutions, while illuminating a new economic, environmental, and spiritual path. In the days leading to July 15, a *Washington Post* front-page anticipated the address with the following headline: CARTER SEEKING ORATORY TO MOVE AN ENTIRE NATION (Tulis, 2017, p. 3; Washington Post, 1979, p. 1). This was Carter’s moment, a moment that would have far-reaching ramifications for the remainder of his term.

Given the gravity of the topic, the President worked diligently to produce his desired effect, drawing inspiration from “the demands of international and domestic politics to the conflicting advice of those to whom he listened” during his Camp David stay (Horowitz, 2004, p. 225). For the first time ever, Carter focused on his speaking technique. He “practiced his delivery in a jerry-built Oval Office mockup in the Camp David theatre,” and utilized “a speech coach to improve his delivery” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 689). The result was a presidential address “delivered flawlessly . . . with an intensity that

matched the occasion” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 689). As Carter began, he spoke in a measured tone; his voice rarely lifted or fell excessively. His introduction suggests the makings of a ceremonial speech:

Good Evening. This a special night for me. Exactly three years ago, on July 15, 1976, I accepted the nomination of my party to run for President of the United States. I promised you a President who is not isolated from the people, who feels your pain, and who shares your dreams, and who draws his strength and his wisdom from you.

Carter’s tone here is symbolically representative of a farewell address, given the nature of such speeches to occur “in response to a systematic need for a ritual of departure” (Kohrs Campbell and Hall Jamieson, 1990, p. 191). Carter, in fact, *was* calling for a departure from American practices that had taken hold during the post-Vietnam/Watergate era. The Vietnam War had “exposed the fragility of the bonds with which the constitution-makers pinned down the power of the Commander in Chief not only to conduct war but to make war, to create war” (Rosenman and Rosenman, 1976, p. xi). Meanwhile, Watergate had “demonstrated that . . . presidential authority was abused and perverted to a vast degree before the countervailing pressures, partly owing to a stroke of luck, could be brought to bear” (Rosenman and Rosenman, 1976, p. xii). In acknowledging both of these failings during his candidacy, Carter expressed hope that his presidency would be judged based on his attempts to promote a unifying vision of the country’s future (Kohrs Campbell and Hall Jamieson, 1990). From his first day in office, he had attempted to restore trust in the government and, with his “Crisis” speech, he acknowledged that the trust he sought to restore had not entirely been realized (Lovi, 1985).

Carter's vision for the nation had failed to materialize, and he was now tasked with appealing to the country and addressing this lingering problem. This is evidenced in the next section of the speech, as Carter begins to isolate the American challenge of the moment:

I began to ask myself the same question that I now know has been troubling many of you: Why have we not been able to get together as a nation to resolve our serious energy problem? It's clear that the true problems of our nation are much deeper -- deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or recession.

In a show of humility, acknowledges his limitations to that point. He confesses to the viewing audience, "I've worked hard to put my campaign promises into law, and I have to admit, with just mixed success" (Carter, 1979). However, he also counters with a reiteration of the words he spoke during his inaugural address: "After listening to the American people, I have been reminded again that all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America" (Carter, 1979). By pivoting in this fashion, he fulfills Tulis's (2017) argument that, "Presidents have a duty constantly to defend themselves publicly, to promote policy initiatives nationwide, and to inspire the nation" (p. 4). After defending himself, Carter would promote initiatives and, in doing so, move toward a more inspirational tone and message.

Before attempting to inspire, however, he would continue to drive home one of his most salient and thematic points—that America was experiencing a "crisis of confidence which struck at the nation's social fabric" (Horowitz, 2005, p. 24). At one point, he echoed Christopher Lasch, stating, "Just as we are losing our confidence in the

future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 24/Carter, 1979). He would then reference Robert Bellah, suggesting that America has lost its sense of civil religion and its faith:

As you know, there is a growing disrespect for government and for churches and for schools, the news media, and other institutions. This is not a message of happiness or reassurance, but it is the truth and it is a warning. (Carter, 1979).

Lastly, Carter invokes Bell, arguing that the public had grown increasingly dependent upon government, and the government, in turn, was failing to meet the demands of the people:

Looking for a way out of this crisis, our people have turned to the Federal Government and found it isolated from the mainstream of our nation’s life. Washington, D.C., has become an island. The gap between our citizens and our government has never been so wide. The people are looking for honest answers, not easy answers; clear leadership, not false claims and evasiveness and politics as usual.

Though Carter had borrowed from Lasch, Bellah, and Bell, and had relied heavily upon his speechwriters and advisors Pat Caddell, Stuart Eizenstat, Gerald Rafshoon, and Vice President Walter Mondale, he had ultimately “played a commanding role in shaping his talk,” as his personal notes reveal “differences between raw material and delivered speech” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 103). The result was an impassioned, yet thoughtful address, a Jeremiad that fulfilled both Aristotelian and Ciceronian attempts at a reconciliation between reason and emotion in public address (Remer, 2013).

For Aristotle, rhetoric amounted to more than merely a persuasive art; it involved discovering those elements that contribute to both convincing and being convinced, and how those elements apply to a given situation (Ijsseling, 1976). Ingraham (2013) examines Aristotelian philosophy further with specific regard to the manner by which Aristotle divided rhetoric between the elite (*gnorimoi*) and the mass audience or ordinary citizens (*demos*). Aristotle maintained that the mass audience is quite ordinary, while the elites are extraordinary, rare, and more special (Ingraham, 2013). This clearly established an ideology of class separation, the reverberations of which various groups of people still feel today.

From Aristotle, different types of discourse emerge from different systems of government (Kohrs Campbell and Hall Jamieson, 1990). Carter's speech was partly epideictic, which Aristotle classified as a "form of rhetoric that praises or blames on ceremonial occasions" (Kohrs Campbell and Hall Jamieson, 1990, p. 14). Yet, the "Crisis" speech also classifies as deliberative, containing "thoughtful consideration, usually signified by careful, logical argument" (Kohrs Campbell and Hall Jamieson, 1990, p. 81). Carter was promoting a course of action, which Aristotle maintained was a facet of political oration. A political orator establishes the grounds for which a suggested course of action should either be accepted or rejected, based on whether the resultant course will either result in good or harm (Roberts, 1954). Carter's proposed course of action involved sacrifice, which would lead to a good. Yet, the nation rejected this and decided upon a course of action that involved excess—harm masquerading as good.

In contrast to Aristotle, Cicero's goal was to unite the ideals of the philosopher, the public official, and the orator, thereby synthesizing philosophy, politics, and rhetoric (Ijsseling, 1976). Cicero breathed life into rhetoric, creating a living art form that achieved a usefulness beyond mere theoretic thought. Instead, it became a political and social tool for use in shaping society. In *De Inventione*, Cicero makes specific mention of eloquence, stating, "From eloquence comes the surest and safest protection for one's friends" (13). Cicero, essentially, created an ideal of the "supreme orator . . . [as] one whose speech instructs, delights, and moves the minds of his audience" (357). Following this line of thought, a speaker, taking a cue from Cicero, "should not lose touch with what an ordinary person [might] think and feel" (Vickers, 1998, 2). Carter had attempted to eliminate the Aristotelian notion of class separation and embrace Ciceronian eloquence by convincing ordinary citizens to depend more on themselves rather than the government. By turning to faith and tradition, he believed that a restoration of confidence could occur:

First of all, we must face the truth, and then we can change our course. We simply must have faith in each other, faith in our ability to govern ourselves, and faith in the future of this nation. Restoring that faith and that confidence to America is now the most important task we face. It is a true challenge of this generation of Americans. (Carter, 1979).

The earnestness of Carter's words here and, more importantly, his tone, supports the argument that he placed people before policy.

According to Stuckey (2010), people "are sometimes props" for presidential speeches. Sometimes they are the subject, but "are rarely the actual audience" (p. 42). In

this case, the “Crisis” speech is an example of presidential rhetoric adapted specifically and expertly for its audience. Like FDR, Carter indirectly expressed a certain willingness to “innovate in the conduct of his office” by focusing on people rather than policy in this address (Gould, 2003, p. 82). Even more so, as Frederick Jackson Turner had done in his 1893 essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Carter, likewise, “had personified those attributes worthy of emulation by Americans” (Carpenter, 1978, p. 108). He had attempted to leave Americans with a sense of hope that transcended the warnings he had given them at the outset of the speech. Thus, Carter attempted to stimulate national morale by illuminating a pathway that would permit Americans to leave behind the crisis of the 1970s and emerge from it a better nation (Gould, 2003).

The message of hope that Carter offered began with calling on the past, recognizing the present, and charting a new course:

All the traditions of our past, all the lessons of our heritage, all the promises of our future point to another path -- the path of common purpose and the restoration of American values. That path leads to true freedom for our nation and ourselves. We can take the first steps down that path as we begin to solve our energy problem.

Despite the fact that, like his Presidential hero, Harry Truman, Carter was not the most compelling speaker when giving a prepared address, he was able to embody Truman in his conviction that the nation had reached a turning point and that he, as President, must lead (Gould, 2003).

Yet, circling back to Jamieson’s suggestion of a stipulation that he must maintain a certain expectation, it is possible that Carter actually gave the nation an antithesis of

what was expected, or something different entirely. Carter's speech was not a Fireside Chat, a State of the Union, a farewell address, a declaration of war, or a direct response to crisis. The "Crisis of Confidence" address was unusual, in that it crosses boundaries that other forms of presidential address have established. This, ultimately, provided frustrating for critics. Critics use great speeches as markers to judge new works, and if a speaking event and a speaker's past appearances "do not crystallize a generic classification before one has experienced the work, the work itself will solicit and obtain generic classification" (Jamieson, 1973, p. 168). In other words, an assertion can be made that Carter's speech title, "Energy and National Goals: Address to the Nation" was too generic and failed to provide a crystallization of Carter's true theme and purpose of the speech. Therefore, critics found it hard to digest, thereby giving it a generic classification—rhetoric of malaise.

As stated previously in chapter two, the great irony of Jimmy Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" address receiving the unofficial title "The 'Malaise' Speech" is the complete absence of the word "malaise" throughout the approximately thirty-minute presentation. Despite this, political pundits and politicians (Ronald Reagan, for instance) seized on the word in attempts to discredit Carter and assert that he had "joined the public in its malaise" (Genovese, 1990, pp. 45-52). Eizenstat (2018) attributes the "malaise" designation to Carter's chief pollster, Pat Caddell, who had introduced the term in a memorandum to the President prior to the address. When Caddell subsequently, passed a copy of that memo on to a reporter from *The New Yorker*, "malaise" was the printed descriptor of the speech. The negative branding stuck and, ultimately, contributed to Carter's failed reelection bid the following year.

The Energy Crisis of the 1970s, along with its effects—gasoline shortages, stagflation, and high unemployment—had shaped America’s historical moment, thereby requiring an authentic communicative response (Arnett, 2014). Carter employed what Arnett (2014) describes as Communicative Meeting—an “understanding of and responsibility for another and the basic existential fact that relationships matter” (p. 261). In this sense, it was the relationship between a president and the American people that mattered to Carter, and he humbled himself before the nation by stating simply, “I need your help” (Carter, 1979). While Carter had often been dismissed as preachy in his discourse, the fact that he asked for the help of a nation suggests that he put the people before his ego, and that, by doing so, Carter had “swung them back to his side” with the delivery of his “Crisis address” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 691). While the public listened, the press, the politicians, and even the intellectuals were varied in their response, and, ultimately, “Malaise” was the category that stuck. Yet, looking deeper, while the critics dismissed the speech, the public initially responded well to Carter’s message. These responses, as well as the responses of the three men—Christopher Lasch, Robert Bellah, and Daniel Bell—whom Carter drew direct inspiration from in crafting the speech, will be examined in the following section.

A Speech’s Spectacle: Reactions to “Crisis of Confidence”

It is only prudent in this examination of President Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” speech to first consider the reactions of Daniel Bell, Robert Bellah, and Christopher Lasch, especially given their influence on Carter prior to the delivery of his address. While each separately acknowledged Carter’s integrity and commitment to the seriousness of the historical moment, their interpretation and analysis of the message

varied. Bell criticized Carter's logos, arguing that the attempt to connect presidential policy with shifts in cultural dynamics was flawed. Further, Bell claimed that, ultimately, it is nearly impossible to administrate solutions to societal and cultural problems (Horowitz, 2005).

Robert Bellah detailed many of his observations about President Carter in an interview titled "A Night at Camp David" (1979; 2005). First, he offers Carter a compliment, suggesting that he "does know some things about the real world" (p. 153). When Carter asked Bellah point-blankly what he should say to the nation, Bellah "urged him to be . . . 'a teaching President,' one who points out what it means to maintain our tradition. . . who gives something new as well as something that continues what is old (1979; 2005, p. 153). Further Bellah invited Carter to tell the nation hard truths in lieu of what they might have wanted to hear (1979; 2005). Though referring to Carter as possibly the most decent human being to hold the office of President, Bellah maintained that Carter had no overarching social vision for the country and, rather, was "too quick to rely on technocrats" and gimmicks to fix the problems that plagued the nation (1979; Horowitz, 2005, p. 154). Bellah simultaneously chastised the American people, offering little sympathy for their plight and positing that they had exactly the kind of government they deserved (1979; Horowitz, 2005). He felt Carter should have been blunter with the nation, and that only two choices were optional—authoritarianism or democratic reorganization (Bellah; Horowitz, 1979; 2005).

Of the three scholars, Christopher Lasch's response was the most positive. He considered it "courageous, powerful, and often moving," and that it managed to "speak realistically about the country's troubles without invoking a mood of panic or national

emergency” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 158). Most significantly for Lasch, the speech attempted to connect moral and cultural issues with political ones (Horowitz, 2005), in stark contrast to Bell’s perspective that such a connection was tenuous at best. Lasch considered the primary concern in the country to be the “ascendency of corporate interests . . . and . . . the managerial and professional elite that gets most of the social and economic advantages” due to the current distribution of power. This class of elites comprise the highest level of the cultural of narcissism that Lasch wrote about at the time (Horowitz, 2005, p. 159).

Initially, the “Crisis” speech resonated with the American people, but not necessarily with the media. Their reviews were largely mixed. *The Wall Street Journal* reflected the opinions of many corporate leaders, insisting that Carter still relied too heavily on big government. The *National Review* compared Carter to an evangelical preacher whose words and actions are contradictory. The *Los Angeles Times* also chided Carter for taking on the role of preacher, yet gave him credit for suggesting the importance of the moment and making a call to action. In contrast to these more negative views, *The Baltimore Sun* praised Carter for his determination, not seen since before he entered the White House (Horowitz, 2005).

While a number of national organizations offered Carter a reasonably high amount of praise for his actions, they were not entirely moved by the pathos of the speech, nor did they believe that Carter effectively addressed all of their problems or went far enough in his proposed solutions. *The National Review* opined that Carter’s behaviors—cancelling his July 5 speech, retreating to Camp David, and then delivering his “Crisis” speech—had left America and other foreign nations “perplexed” and

“befuddled” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 129). Further, the editorial insinuated that, despite Carter’s honesty and reasoned argument that America shared responsibility for its situation, he ultimately “had no answers for the intractable problems confronting this nation and the world” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 129). Theodore Snyder Jr., then president of the Sierra Club, offered commendation to Carter for his “bold attempt to confront a desperate situation,” yet argued that his proposed program to reduce energy use from foreign nations was “far from adequate” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 138). *Jewish Week*, a New York City publication, printed an editorial that also supported the president’s stance, but called for a more complete and more definite break from both the liberalism and anti-liberalism that promoted closed minds (Horowitz, 2005, p. 144). Lastly, an editorial in *America*, a joint American-Canadian Jesuit publication, supported the president, but derided his reference to “war” when speaking about the energy problem (Horowitz, 2005).

Apart from the media and organizations with a vested political interest in the speech, the American people, by-and-large, still liked Carter and wanted him to succeed, even in spite of the many political and economic problems that had plagued his presidency. They acknowledged “his honesty, intelligence, and integrity, and they respected his hard work” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 692). Perhaps their fondness for Carter contributed to the speech’s immediate success, for it appeared as though Carter had managed to capture the spirit of his 1976 campaign that had catapulted him to the White House (Eizenstat, 2018). Other criticisms notwithstanding, the fresh start that Carter had desired was on the horizon because his message managed to reach the people and resonate with them. Whether premediated or divinely inspired, Carter’s actions—having

cancelled his previously scheduled address, retreating to Camp David, and delivering the “Crisis” address—had created an effective spectacle, thereby embodying the exigence of the modern presidency (Nelson, 2014). According to Miroff (2014), “One of the most distinctive features of the modern presidency is its constant cultivation of popular support” (p. 231). To garner support for his message, Carter attempted to be both “inspirational and highly specific at the same time” by offering a broad, philosophical message and then outlining steps to combat the issues that he identified (Tulis, 2017, p. 136). For a brief period, this rhetorical strategy paid off with the American people, as his approval ratings would attest.

A small percentage of those who had watched President Carter’s speech July 15, wrote letters to him, revealing a “sense of connection” to the message of sacrifice; many also identified with various lessons that the speech offered (Horowitz, 2005, p. 148). Some Americans sympathized with Carter and appreciated his call to restore a national sense of community. Others responded in more deeply religious tones than even Carter had expressed during the speech. Many others urged Carter to take stronger actions and positions than those he had outlined in the latter portion of the address, such as a “propaganda blitz” or a “war-time footing.” (Horowitz, 2005, pp. 148-149). In a memo from Hugh Carter (1979; 2005), the President’s cousin and one-time majority leader of the Georgia state senate, the strongest sentiment expressed by the American people was that the nation’s purpose and spirit needed rebuilding. Regarding Carter’s proposed energy program, respondents most highly supported the following (Carter, 1979; Horowitz, 2005, p. 150):

1. Commitment to conserve.
2. Lower dependence on foreign oil by setting goals and quotas.
3. Energy Security Corporation; including energy bonds, average Americans investing directly in America's energy security and legislation for Solar Bank.
4. Enact law so utilities cut use of oil by 50% by the end of the next decade by switching to other fuels, especially coal.
5. Authority for mandatory conservation; standby gasoline rationing; \$10 billion to strengthen public transportation system and increased aid for poor/energy.
6. Congress must enact Windfall Profits Tax.
7. Energy Mobilization Board.
8. Presence of nuclear power in President's program.
9. Continued efforts toward reducing inflation by balancing the budget.
10. Mandatory compliance of oil companies with President's program.
11. Increased cooperation with Mexico and Canada.

Other responses to the President included well wishes, encouragement, and confirmation that the nation supported his efforts.

Given the positive groundswell following the "Crisis" address, we are left to ask why Carter's message ultimately failed to earn him a second term in office, particularly after such a strong show of initial support. In attempting to answer the question, we turn to Miroff (2014), who provides some insight into the qualities of presidential spectacle and, more specifically, presidential support. For popular backing of a president to be sustained, "the public must believe in the president's leadership qualities" (Miroff, 2014, p. 231). Further, those who respond to presidential spectacles, a speech in this case, will

not have their vision completely obscured by the spectacle. They will continue to acknowledge presidential performance and the perceived “sense of the overarching and intangible strengths and weaknesses of the administration” (Miroff, 2014, p. 232). In the following weeks, an increase of blame narratives aimed at Carter’s perceived dearth of leadership caused the speech’s resonance to dissipate. Those who had originally bought into the message would soon turn sour towards it, starting with Carter’s ill-advised reshuffling of his cabinet only days after the speech (Horowitz, 2005).

The hopes for the speech’s endurance may have faded due to Carter’s “own unforced error” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 694). Taking the advice of advisor, Hamilton Jordan, Carter abruptly reorganized his cabinet. He appointed Jordan as Chief of Staff, and asked for the resignations of all cabinet members under the auspice that some would ultimately be retained while others not (Eizenstat, 2018). For Eizenstat (2018) and others in Carter’s administration, “All the goodwill built up by the retreat to Camp David and the president’s speech seemed to be thrown away in a sophomoric effort to look tough” (p. 698). As a result, “In less than a week the rave reception given to the speech began to recede” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 702). Workers in the White House mailroom, who, immediately following Carter’s speech, had never seen such a flood of positive mail, admitted that the instant rush of hope had been dashed by the cabinet reorganization (Eizenstat, 2018).

This raises a salient point. By examining the presidency as a spectacle, we must observe “not only how a president seeks to appear, but also what the public sees” (Miroff, 2014, p. 232). The president, throughout the past two centuries, has become an embodiment of government. Therefore, “it seems perfectly normal for millions upon

millions of Americans to concentrate their hopes and fears directly and personally upon him” (Lowi, 1985, p. 86). When a president’s behaviors appear to clash with his message, it is understandable that hopes can decline while fears arise. In Carter’s case, “It looked like a total pandemonium . . . If we had just held steady [following the speech], I think we might have pulled it around” (Eizenstat, 2018; Mondale, 1991, p. 704). Yet, at the time, Carter held steadfast to his decision to go ahead with the cabinet restructure, insisting during a White House meeting on August 6, 1979, that the press had contributed to the public’s opinion by distorting facts and treating Carter as they did other institutions—by trivializing them (Eizenstat, 2018; Carter, 1979). Thus, regarding spectacle, and the people’s response, it may be argued that “the most distinctive characteristic of a spectacle is that the actions that constitute it are meaningful, not for what they achieve, but for what they signify” (Miroff, 2014, p. 232). Therefore, what did Carter’s actions signify? Put simply, they signified a concern for the moral and ethical direction of the nation. He saw the cabinet restructure as an essential first step in holding true to what he said he would do—enact a six-point plan for reversing the downward economic and social spiral that the energy crisis had created.

The six-point plan called upon the American people to make sacrifices during this time in the name of patriotism:

I’m asking you for your good and for your nation’s security to take no unnecessary trips, to use carpools or public transportation whenever you can, to park your car one extra day per week, to obey the speed limit, and to set your thermostats to save fuel. Every act of energy conservation like this is more than just common sense, I tell you it is an act of patriotism.

For Carter to ask for sacrifice, he needed to show the public that he, too, would make changes and seek immediate results. After persuasion from Jordan, Carter determined that his cabinet was the first place to start. Despite the rhetorical weight of his words, and the administrative actions that he took, Carter's desire to be "both inspirational and exhaustive as to specific legislation initiatives" only made the public disprove of him more in the end (Tulis, 2017, p. 136). As he had demonstrated throughout his days in office, Carter attempted to be everything to everyone, thereby becoming mired in political quicksand.

Directly referencing the speech, Tulis (2017) explains that, while it had presented overarching themes, it had no specific argument. Carter talked about national confidence as "the idea which founded our nation and has guided our development as a people" (Carter, 1979). He talked about our national awareness that "piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose" (Carter, 1979). He talked about a national "disrespect for government and for churches and for schools, the news media, and other institutions" (Carter, 1979). Yet, the speech is also more than merely a checklist of talking points, which critics have suggested Carter was often guilty of providing (Tulis, 2017). The speech is filled with both measured emotion and reason, and remains a point of study in communication ethics. While the speech was, perhaps, too overarching, it is important to glean from it the message that Carter was trying to impress upon the nation, that our narcissism was leading us down an unsustainable path.

In time, the effect of this message ultimately fell flat, as did Carter's approval ratings. This is partly due to the nature of the relationship between the American public and its leaders, specifically its presidents. Americans "expect optimism and

encouragement, not pessimism and chastisement,” and though many people shared Carter’s sentiments, “most wanted to continue consuming, [and] not be warned of the immorality of their pursuit” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 25). Detracting further from the public’s morale following the speech were a number of political controversies and global incidents, all of which also made the situation worse for Carter. The day after his speech, Saddam Hussein seized power in Iraq (Horowitz, 2005). Later that year, Islamic fundamentalists seized the U.S. Embassy and took sixty-six Americans hostages (Ribuffo, 1988). In December, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. At home, Senator Ted Kennedy challenged Carter for the Democratic nomination (Horowitz, 2005). All of these situations proved insurmountable for Carter and paved the way for the entrance of the eventual Republican Party nominee, Ronald Reagan. Along with the changing of the guard in the White House, a most serious issue emerged from the fallout of the crisis of the 1970s, one that has arguably continued into the twenty-first century. While Regan emboldened the managerial and professional elite throughout the 1980s, Carter had tried to restrain them during his presidency. This presents a stark contrast in examples of presidential leadership. It is pragmatic to examine presidential leadership and rhetoric to formulate a basis for contextualizing how Carter’s application of both affected the speech.

Presidential Leadership: An Undergirding of the “Crisis” Speech

Leadership is a discipline within organizational and presidential communication and rhetoric that continues to attract attention. According to Chin-Chung (2011), the United States in particular has seen a rise in “more profound and comprehensive scholarships on leadership in the past several decades” (p. 761). Leadership itself is

defined by Yukl (2002) as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives” (p. 7). Of course, what must be done and the implementation of which has traditionally been debated. The same holds true for organizational communication and how it is researched. Two primary areas for studying organizational communication are the post-positivist perspective and the social constructionist perspective. Within each perspective, any number of micro-areas are often examined. For example, leader traits (Antonakis, 2011), leader behavior styles (Stogdill and Coons, 1957), leader-behavior contingencies (Fielder, 1978), leader-member relationship theories (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995), charismatic and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; House, 1977), and a bevy of others have all been given their share of scholarly attention. Meanwhile, Neufeld, Wan, and Fang (2010) discovered through their research on leadership distance that communication effectiveness relates directly to perceived leadership performance, while physical distance had no influence on these qualities.

According to Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014), definitions vary in the post-positivist tradition. One line of thought is that the terms “manager” and “leader” can be interchanged. Blakesley (1995), using his behavioral method for analyzing leadership, frames Jimmy Carter as a president who “preferred to work alone. . . [he] tended to work on highly technical, complex questions at his desk in isolation from others; then, he would announce his decisions in writing to his subleaders” (p. 62). This analysis would suggest that Carter was in line more with a managerial style of leadership. He was more a written communicator than a verbal one. That presidential rhetoric lends itself to a

president becoming a symbol of an “organization,” i.e., the head of state; the president must interact effectively with the Congress, the Court, and the nation’s people (Kohrs Campbell & Hall Jamieson, 1990). Preferring to communicate primarily in writing can subtract from a President’s overall effectiveness as leader. This plagued Carter. The “Crisis” speech proved that he was a capable speechmaker and, thus, a capable leader. Yet, he tended to undercut his own abilities by way of his own organizational style.

Advocates of the social constructionist perspective maintain that leadership is a construct of socio-historical and collective meaning (Barge, 2007; Barge and Fairhurst, 2008; Fairhurst, 2007a; Parker, 2005). This meaning breaks down into three themes (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014). The first is an emphasis on leadership as “a meaning-centered view of communication” (2014, p. 407). Second, a resistance to trait theory. Third, a higher encompassing of the treatment of power. Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014) maintain that these three themes “have spawned a new research agenda involving leadership as (a.) The co-management of meaning; (b.) influential acts of human and material organizing; (c.) a site of power and influence; and (d.) alive with the potential for moral accountability, reflexivity, and change” (p. 407). Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014) list six points about the nature of the lens through which communication leadership may be studied (pp. 414-415):

1. Leadership communication is transmissional and meaning centered.
2. Leadership is relational. It is neither leader centric nor follower centric.
3. Influential acts of human-material organizing are the medium and outcome of leadership communication.
4. Leadership is inherently power based.

5. Leadership is a diverse, global phenomenon.
6. Leadership communication is alive with the potential for reflexivity, moral accountability, and change.

Again, turning to Blakesley (1995), we can see how the aforementioned plays out in Carter's leadership style with regard to meaning, relations, and power. Carter displayed an analysis-delegation style of leadership during his time in the White House. In other words, he was preoccupied with details and achieving high-quality outcomes (Blakesley, 1995). This diminished his ability to relate personally to those in his inner-circle. As his foreign affairs advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski once remarked, Carter "never thanked me for anything, nor did he ever rebuke me sharply" (Witherspoon, 1991, p. 206). Again, this would suggest that, while Carter exhibited ethos and logos in his leadership, pathos was lacking. As a result, his overall style and personality traits failed to move those with whom he worked.

A president's personality, style, and leadership characteristics also greatly influence his standing with the government and with the American people. Blakesley (1995) presents three different criteria from which to judge presidential leadership:

1. Legal Approach: This approach, the oldest in the study, "is a government-centered, historical, and descriptive perspective." Studies focus "upon the constitutional and statutory foundations for the president's formal powers, responsibilities, and limitations" (p. 4).
2. Institutional Approach: This approach "views the presidency as an institution in which the president performs several roles." For instance, a president is

simultaneously the head of state, the commander in chief, the national domestic policy initiator, and the national spokesperson (p. 5).

3. The Neo-Institutional Approach: This last approach studies the “origins, formal and informal structures, modes of operation, and socioeconomic-cultural consequences” of actions that presidents take (p. 6).

Blakesley (2005) chooses to focus on a president’s behavior and personality in his analysis of presidential leadership, given the conclusion of numerous scholars that this means by which to examine leadership can explain presidential actions more effectively. Following this line of thought, Greenstein (1975) offers several types of situations that allow for personality expression of presidents (p. 7):

1. “Ambiguous situations leave room for personality to express itself.”
2. “The absence of standardized ‘mental sets,’ whether role expectations or ideology, leaves room for variability according to personality.”
3. “If sanctions are not attached to given courses of action, the possibility of variability is greater.”
4. “High intensity of feelings in the leader may override standard expectations.”
5. “The greater the demands on the leader to act at high levels of skill, the more likely individuality will be expressed.”

Behavior and personality lend themselves to a president’s overall style, which Barber (1985) describes as a “president’s habitual way of performing his three political roles . . . rhetoric, personal relations, and homework” (p. 5). Motter (1992) assesses Carter’s presidential style on this basis. He notes that Carter’s style of governing and leading

created a scenario whereby his ability to prove himself worthy of the public's trust was the basis for his success or failure. The popular theory today holds that Carter was a weak leader. Consider, however, the key items of his agenda— “a comprehensive energy program, a treaty returning the Panama Canal to Panama, reform of the welfare system, reorganization, of the executive branch, and a national environmental policy” (Cronin, 1980, pp. 174-175). In hindsight, we can describe such an ambitious agenda as forward thinking and, perhaps, label Carter a visionary of sorts. Yet, in 1977, his agenda was thought to be foolish (Motter, 1992). A reason Carter chose to engage all of these policies at once stemmed from a primary characteristic of his style—a commitment to the American people, based on his campaign promise that he would not lie to them (Motter, 1992). He had expressed to the people his intent to pass the aforementioned legislative initiatives, and he intended to follow through.

Critics, however, disregard his ethos and suggest, instead, that Carter had failed to follow the established, often unwritten, rules of political tradition (Motter, 1992). They argue that Carter “cloaked traditional views, weakness in human relations, poor management skills, policy inconsistency, and diplomatic inexperience by claiming a mantle of virtue and principles (Sneh, 2008, p. 230). Some have said that Carter could have offset these inequities by acting presidential. In other words, his desire to affect an image of humility as president, Carter created an image of himself as an ordinary public servant rather than as a president of the strongest nation on earth (Motter, 1992). His rhetorical gifts (or lack, thereof) would contribute to this image, as the public widely considered his personality dry and his public speaking equally lackluster, devoid of considerable inspiration. Therefore, is certainly possible that, while many identified with

his message, a pre-determined bias against the speech by the media and large pockets of the nation would have superseded its positive presidential and rhetorical elements.

According to Laracey (2009), Communication studies scholars have a broad definition of presidential rhetoric. Generally, scholars agree that a Presidential rhetorical act can address anything, not merely matters of policy, and that Presidential rhetoric can be directed to anyone. In this context, Laracey concludes that every president who has held office has utilized rhetoric for political ends (Lucas 2008/Hoffman 2009). Since its publication in 1987, Jeffrey Tulis's *The Rhetorical Presidency* "has achieved landmark status in the field of presidential studies" (Laracey, 2009, p. 908). Its legacy has endured, particularly in academia, where it remains the focus of many literature reviews in doctoral dissertations and both undergraduate and graduate courses are taught on the subject (Stuckey, 2010). Tulis's primary argument is that the manner of presidential communication has changed from the 19th to the 20th century, beginning with the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. At that time, rhetoric began to evolve into a "principle tool of presidential governance" (Tulis, 2017, p. 4). Today, people assume that presidents have a "duty constantly to defend themselves publicly, to promote policy initiatives nationwide, and to inspire the population" (Tulis, 2017, p. 4). Presidents do this through rhetoric, since rhetoric is both the result of ideas and the medium for the expression of those ideas. Further, political rhetoric is, at the same time, "a practical result of basic doctrines of governance, and an avenue to the meaning of alternative constitutional understandings" (Tulis, 2017, pp. 14-15). Tulis points to television, which, at the time of the book's original publication (1987), was arguably the primary technological medium for presidents to get their messages to the public. Yet, Tulis (2017) contends that the

medium itself did not propel the evolution of the presidency to a more public office. Rather, their appearance on television was predicated upon a president's credibility to actually do so.

Tulis also argues that the rhetorical presidency routinely makes calls for action directly to the people of the nation, as opposed to submitted requests for action to Congress. In this sense, it "transforms crisis politics into normal politics" (Crockett, 2009, p. 933). Given this, was Carter playing the role of the politician after all? With the "Crisis" speech, Carter did make an appeal directly to the people, arguably after two years of difficulties in passing his policies through Congress. In addition, he designated the events surrounding the nation's energy and economic problems as a crisis.

However, according to Scacco and Coe (2016), Tulis's Rhetorical Presidency paradigm is no longer tenable due to changes in the national landscape's citizens and media. Further, there is now a new "emphasis on the rhetorical aspects of the presidency altering the nature of the institution itself" (Scacco and Coe, 2016, p. 2015). According to political theorists, political institutions that once united the nation, i.e., presidency, media, political parties, and organized religions, now are bereft of the public's trust (Scacco and Coe, 2016; Bennett, 1998; Smith, 2015). The argument here, however, is that the rhetorical presidency did not change. Rather, the public's reliance on tradition changed. *We* changed, not the president.

A somewhat differing view of presidential leadership and rhetoric is Richard Neustadt's (1990), as presented in his book, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. Regarding the work, Moe (1993) posits that it "brought the behavioral revolution to the study of the presidency" (p. 338). Neustadt specifically focuses "on the

ways a president could gain informal power through persuasion and bargaining.” They must utilize these skills in order to achieve their goals (Blakesley, 1995, p. 12). This would appear to support the idea that Carter failed to achieve his goals partly because he was averse to compromise and engagement in the political nature of policy passage. However, Neustadt “focused only upon the presidential skills of bargaining and persuasion and failed to explore organizing, delegating, and analytical leadership competencies” (Blakesley, 1995, p. 12). This analysis would work in Carter’s favor, supporting the idea that Carter, while, perhaps, lacking in persuasion and bargaining, was highly skilled in organization, delegation, and analysis.

Other analyses of presidential leadership are provided by Buchanan, who “identifies three competency factors as the most relevant for determining how a presidential candidate would handle the job of president.

- 1) “The ability to create and maintain a supportive relationship with the American people”

- 2) “The candidate’s management style”

- 3) “The candidate’s substantive knowledge of politics relevant to the presidency”

(Blakesley, 1995, p. 13). Where was Carter according to these criteria? It would appear that Carter’s relationship with the American people was strong at first, but was not sustained; his management style is said to have lacked (need sources on this); his knowledge of the political nature of Washington D.C. as it pertained to the office of president was not strong. Rather, Carter relied on his experience as Governor of Georgia, believing that he could apply it to his Presidential administration.

Lastly, according to Crockett (2009), “the modern ethic of routine rhetorical leadership requires presidents to please their audience” (p. 936). Further, administrations have, throughout the modern era, declared various philosophical wars—wars on poverty, cancer, drugs, terror, etc. However, whenever war is declared, the American people expect to emerge victorious. When wars are not won, the status of the president is diminished and the public grows disappointed (Crockett, 2009). This contributed to Carter’s election defeat in 1980. Crisis politics have become normal politics (Crockett, 2009), and a certain banality has crept into the American psyche. This circles back to Christopher Lasch (1979) and his assertion that Americans are continuously in crisis mode. By the time the “Crisis of Confidence” address was made, Carter had already fallen victim to the normalization of crisis.

Conclusion

In *The Modern American Presidency*, Lewis Gould (2003) argues that Jimmy Carter, “proved incapable of rising to the challenges of his term,” and either failed to recognize or simply ignored the fact that the events of the past decade had nearly irreparably tarnished the office of the Presidency (p. 179). According to Gould, Carter erroneously “approached the responsibilities as if the presidency was as powerful as it had ever been” (p.182). He insists that, had Carter only carried out the rituals of the job, the prestige of the presidency would have automatically done the rest for him (p. 182). There are errors with Gould’s assessment in this particular case.

At a Democratic fundraising affair in New York City in 1976, Carter himself acknowledged the previous failings of the office for which he campaigned, inviting the audience not to be apathetic. He argued, “Our government can work, and it will work, if

we can only have leaders once again who have wisdom, and who are as good in office as the people who put them in office” (Motter, 1992, U.S. Congress, 1976, p. 1052).

Clearly, Carter was aware of the misuses of the office of the presidency. So, to the next question, did Carter ignore this post-election? We only need turn to the “Crisis of Confidence” speech for the answer—that Carter’s intention to restore dignity and respectability to the office of president following the Johnson and Nixon administrations was of paramount importance:

We were sure that ours was a nation of the ballot, not the bullet, until the murders of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. We were taught that our armies were always invincible and our causes were always just, only to suffer the agony of Vietnam. We respected the Presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate.

Gould’s claim that Carter should have simply carried out the “rituals of the job,” and that the “prestige of the presidency” would do the rest runs counter to Gould’s later remark that Carter “began his administration determined to show that he would not be identified with the imperial aspects of the office” (2003, pp. 182-184). Motter (1992) supports Carter’s desire to break from the Imperial Presidency, noting that Carter demanded much of himself and immersed himself in the role of governing as no president before him had done. As a result, the hope that Carter initially inspired had not been felt since John F. Kennedy’s inauguration (Motter, 1992). Therefore, to suggest that Carter simply sit back and allow rituals to solve national problems appears counterintuitive.

Gould (2003) further analyzes the Carter presidency, specifically, Carter’s leadership qualities. He insists Carter “suffered from a lack of charisma and star quality,

and that “it was no longer enough for a president simply to do the job. The celebrity process focused attention on the private lives of the president” (p. 185). Herein is part of the continuing problem to which Lasch, Bellah, and Bell (and even Carter indirectly) allude. For the president is foremost a leader. This circles around to the issue of style versus content. Carter’s content was solid, but perhaps his style was lacking. Gould (2003) classifies the modern presidency as requiring “qualities of self-confidence, personal charm, and intellectual discipline that eluded [Carter] after 1976” (p. 186). Therefore, it can only be presumed that Gould’s assessment of Carter is in light of what he considers the necessary qualities of the “modern president,” which, apparently, stresses style over substance, pandering over practice, and celebrity over leadership.

This may be where Carter’s “Crisis” speech comes into play. Given its difficulty in classifying the kind of presidential address, whether it be Jeremiad, crisis response, or some other kind of presidential address, we can run the risk of wasting time focusing more on the speech’s kind rather than on its content and message. Returning to Bakhtin (1986), failure to consider “the peculiarities of generic subcategories of speech in any area of linguistic study leads to perfunctoriness and excessive abstractness, distorts the historicity of the research, and weakens the link between language and life” (p. 63). In other words, any speech in any sphere of communication is rhetorically unique, reflective of the speaker’s uniqueness, and therefore possessive of individual style (Bakhtin, 1986). This is also the case regarding Carter’s leadership. Stylistically, he may not have suited the nation’s image of a strong president, and this also may be a reason why his most important speech, one of the most ethically compelling speeches of the latter twentieth century, is often overlooked among the great speeches of the era. In the case of the figure

and the speech, both are difficult to classify, and that might be why each are often dismissed. Yet, we can note that both are also unique and possessive of style.

Conley (1979) counters a more structured application of genre criticism, stating “Works are not given to us as specimens of a type or genre. . . . One of the worst aspects about genre criticism is precisely that it detaches us from our experience of the work” (1979, p. 52). Jamieson (1973) also adds, “Genres should not be viewed as static forms but as evolving phenomena,” and that “new genres do emerge” (p. 168). She turns to Frye (1957), “the leading contemporary exponent of genre study,” who argued: “the purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify” (pp. 247-248). That was the effort of this chapter. Obviously, President Carter’s “Crisis” address would be categorized broadly as a presidential address. Yet, a more significant question of inquiry is whether the address itself, as a rhetorical artifact, is a model of excellence.

Fisher (1980) claims that a difference exists between calling the speech a rhetorical artifact (a deductive process) or a rhetorical act (an inductive process). The issue is to ensure that such a speech is not one-of-a-kind, not a species of discourse. To do so would be, according to Fisher, erroneous (1980). The argument here is that Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” address is a one-of-a-kind, unlike any televised presidential addresses that came before or since. It does not fall into simply one category or species of discourse. Once again, turning to Frye (2000), we note that Carter’s speech could be thought of as a work of rhetorical art, since art is “central to events and ideas” (p. 243). Carter’s ideas spoke to his leadership, which was grounded in a morality of purpose for the nation. This grounding has, arguably, eroded somewhat into the early twenty-first century.

Therefore, we now circle back and answer our earlier series of questions: Why do we study rhetorical address? Was Carter's "Crisis" speech worthy of study? Was Carter's speech memorable? First, we analyze public address because it gives us a tool for contextualizing our historicity. Secondly, Jimmy Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech is worthy for study, in that it forms the keystone that encapsulates the thoughts, frustrations, fears, successes, failures, and hopes of the American experience during the 1970s. Finally, Carter's speech is memorable, not for its "Malaise Speech" misnomer; rather, it should endure because of its candor, its intimacy, and its honesty. These are three qualities which presidential rhetoric, arguably, lacks. As a result, the next chapter will delve into this issue and present implications of Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech for the field of rhetoric and communication, and continue with the argument that the speech remains relevant today.

Chapter 4: “Crisis of Confidence”: Implications for Rhetoric and Communication

Introduction

The previous chapter attempted to frame the “Crisis of Confidence” speech as a work of presidential rhetoric that exists uniquely within the realm of genre criticism. In other words, the speech is not easily classified as any one type of presidential address. Carter and his speechwriters had, either consciously or not, done an artful job of crafting a multi-themed rhetorical piece which spoke to the hopes, frustrations, and practices of the American people during a precarious time that defined the decade. The overall goal of the last chapter was to reveal the virtues of Carter’s speech, as well as the virtues of Carter as a president and a civic leader. This is significant for the following chapter, as we will now delve into the implications of the “Crisis of Confidence” speech and what Carter’s presidential leadership during a time of national crisis meant then, and means now to the field of rhetoric and communication.

It cannot be understated that Jimmy Carter’s election as President, his organizational choices throughout his term, and his strained relations with Congress and the news media resulted, at least in part, from the attitudes toward the failures of presidents who had held office during the nearly fifteen years prior to Carter’s inauguration. The public’s distrust of its chief executive during that historical moment stems from “an undue reverence which most Americans have traditionally paid to both the office and each new occupant” (Sorensen, 1975, p. 47). It is only human nature to want to believe in leaders; Americans want “desperately to believe whatever the President tells them, particularly at the start of his term” (Sorensen, 1975, p. 47). Therefore, nearly every chief executive experiences a period of cooperation with all

aspects of the government, the media and the public, typically during the first 100-days of his presidency, whereby “the objectives of the press and president coincide” (Paletz and Entman, 1980, p. 421). Yet, the honeymoon period quickly fades, and presidents are soon forced to respond suitably to bickering and conflict between staff, members of Congress, and the public (Paletz and Entman, 1980). It is during this time when presidents reveal their true character and do what they were ultimately elected to do—lead.

In the end, Carter faced three leadership obstacles that proved unassailable to his leadership—the birth of a hypermodern society, the no-win political environment (Light, 1999), and the increasingly anti-intellectual presidency (Lim, 2008). These obstacles, to varying degrees, have obstructed the policies of presidents since Carter’s term. In this chapter, the implications of all three will be addressed, and Carter’s response to each challenge will be analyzed. The goal is to spotlight systemic problems in American political society and how each directly affects the operations of highest office in the land. To achieve this goal, the chapter will first trace the evolution of narcissism and how its effects have led to the rise of a hypermodern society. Secondly, presidential leadership is further handicapped by ongoing power struggles between presidents, Congress, and the media. An attempt to delve further into these relationships will be undertaken. Lastly, presidents are hampered by the rise of anti-intellectualism in presidential rhetoric. The chapter will address this issue and relate it to the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, presenting Carter’s attempts to overcome the problem. Overall, the speech itself will undergird the chapter, since it served as the manifestation for Carter’s rhetorical response to each of the aforementioned challenges to his leadership. The goal of the chapter is to develop a more vivid picture of Carter’s leadership dilemma in the hope that closer

attention might be drawn to these ongoing challenges that presidents and political leaders face.

A Hypermodern Moment—Narcissism’s Evolution into the New Millennium

When Jimmy Carter assumed office in January 1976, in the aftermath of Watergate, he intended to heal America with brotherly love and compassion (Erickson, 1980). Using religious rhetoric, Carter established a level of credibility that the nation had sought in its highest elected official, effectively reaffirming “the separate, but coordinate, roles of God and man” (Erickson, 1980, p. 226). Carter’s rhetoric, according to Erickson, “took two forms: (1) declarations of faith, and (2) revelations regarding intimate religious beliefs and practices” (1980, p. 227). During the 1976 election cycle, religion was “catapulted into the campaign arena with Carter’s personal disclosures of religious practices, experiences, and his claim to an intimate relationship with God” (Erickson, 1980, p. 227). So popular was Carter’s vision of faith in politics that other politicians began to emulate him. Both Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan proclaimed their strong spiritual grounding and their relationship with God in an attempt to connect with voters in the same way Carter had (Erickson, 1980). Most, if not all, presidents since Carter make it a point to invoke the name of God and express at least a minute level of religiosity in their rhetoric.

It is significant to note, however, that, while Carter gave many interviews pertaining to his faith and even penned an autobiography that detailed the same, he refrained from discussing personal experiences and specific religious practices (Erickson, 1980). This affirms Carter’s attempt to maintain a boundary between the public and the private and between politics and religion. Curiously, in this manner, Carter veered

somewhat from the philosophy of his major influence, Reinhold Niebuhr. According to Halliwell (2005), Niebuhr “often bemoaned the separation of politics and religion, but he also detected great benefits, primarily because it prevented the co-option of religious rhetoric for ideological ends” (p. 250). While Carter separated the two, unlike what Niebuhr called for, he managed to refrain from its co-opting. He allowed his faith to influence his actions, but also respected political secularism. The public who eventually voted him into office did so because Carter “(1) exhibited religious humility and assumed a secular position toward sectarian political issues, (2) symbolically demonstrated his faith, and (3) was rhetorically sensitive in adapting religiosity to racial and sectarian voting blocs” (Erickson, 1980, p. 231). This established Carter as a potent political leader, in that he managed to express the tenets of his Christianity without alienating those of other religious backgrounds.

In Niebuhr’s search for strong leadership, an irony emerged in that “he believed the responsibilities of power usually bring with them the corrupting forces of pride and self-righteousness” (Halliwell, 2005, p. 252). Yet, Carter avoided this. He did so, partly, because of his sincerity, which no politician or journalist could ever successfully impugn (Erickson, 1980). James Fallows (1979), Carter’s chief speechwriter during the first half of his presidency, once wrote, “If I had to choose one politician to sit at the Pearly Gates and pass judgement on my soul, Jimmy Carter would be the one” (p. 34). During his campaign, and during the first two months or so of his presidency, Carter used such impressions of himself to win over a nation thirsty for clean leadership.

In winning the 1976 election, Jimmy Carter, perhaps more than any other elected president, had successfully and articulately “woven together civic piety, religious

disclosures, and politics” (Erickson, 1980, p. 235). It was quite a departure from the imperial presidency of Richard Nixon, whereby suspicions of secrecy were the norm and anxieties abounded (Marini, 1992; Villalobos, et al., 2012). Gradually, however, anxiety once again became more and more the norm, and its psychological effect on Americans caused a societal evolution of sorts, brought about by three areas of society governed by opposing principles. The opposition created “a conflict so monumental that it threatened to undermine the health of Western society” (Horowitz, 2004, p. 207). According to Daniel Bell (1976), the first of these areas was the “techno-economic, ruled by rationality, efficiency, and economizing”; the second area was the public, whereby “expanding claims for social justice and equality had led to an ever-greater sense of entitlement among citizens”; lastly was culture and its “search for meaning in expressive forms. . . . In earlier ages these areas had operated in concert, but now they were in conflict” (Horowitz, 2004, p. 207). As a result of this conflict, by the late-1970s the American culture had become destructive and undermined both the economy and the polity.

Bell maintained that, by the latter part of the decade “religious virtues had lost their hold, and ‘pop hedonism’ had triumphed, replacing guilt with anxiety,” and all of this had necessitated a therapeutic mindset (Horowitz, 2004, p. 208). Whereas an American therapeutic mentality emerged during the 1970s, a therapeutic-technologic mentality prevails in the 21st century. During the 1970s, Americans embraced the free market and pushed towards “individual liberation as the expense of restraint and civility” (Horowitz, 2005, p. 5). In the 21st century, we discover that individual liberation

manifests itself, not as much through a Carter-esque spirituality, but rather through our technologies, as we push further into a historical moment defined by hypermodernity.

In *Hypermodern Times* (2005), Gilles Lipovetsky asks the following: “Hypercapitalism, hyperclass, hyperpower, hyperterrorism, hyperindividualism, hypermarket, hypertext—is there anything that isn’t hyper?” (p. 30). He suggests that, in today’s moment, the forces that oppose modernity are ineffectual while the forces of postmodernity have collapsed. In their place, a “second modernity” has emerged, one that remains deregulated and globalized. This second modernity rests upon “three axiomatic elements: 1) the market, 2) technocratic efficiency and 3) the individual” (Lipovetsky, 2005, pp. 31-32). Whereas energy use could be considered a manifestation of these three elements during the 1970s, internet use could be considered a manifestation today. In the hypermodern moment, individual behavior is “caught up in the machinery of excess” (Lipovetsky, 2005, p. 32). Excess today is embodied through the internet, both in the amount of its use and the intent of its use. When President Carter (1979) suggested years ago that we, as a nation, are not defined by what we do, but by what we own, he referred to energy and product consumption. Today, along with the products that we accumulate, we also accumulate information in cyberspace. Now, our products and, therefore, our wants and desires, are even more easily accessible to us, only a few clicks away.

The hypermodern moment is ruled by information and speed—the faster we can accumulate information, the more power we have. Therefore, a need for constant motion exists, only exacerbated by our digital technologies. According to Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier (2014), “The amount of stored information grows four times faster than the world economy, while the processing power of computers grows nine times faster” (p. 9).

Therefore, we continually try to evolve and accelerate so as not to be left behind by progress. We, thereby, become assimilated into a cult of “technocratic modernization” (Lipovetsky, 2005, p. 34). However, by joining this cult, we are only rewarded with risk and uncertainty, the very qualities that propel Lasch’s culture of narcissism. In hypermodernity, as with the culture of narcissism, any semblance of a carefree attitude has gone for good, replaced with impending feelings of anxiousness and insecurity (Lipovetsky, 2005). Whereas the nation’s insecurities were channeled through its energy use during the 1970s, its insecurities are channeled through internet practices today. Inevitably, and in a similar fashion as the 1970s, uneasiness begins to dominate our lives. We envy the perceived lifestyles of our social media “friends,” while, at the same time, we work tirelessly to promote our lives in the hope of receiving validation. On and on, the cycle spins as we engage in survival behaviors. President Carter alluded to this situation in 1979, when he stated that Americans had lost faith “not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy.” With the loss of faith in unity, Americans turn inward and toward their technologies as a means to rule and shape their own individualized selves.

In addition to Lipovetsky’s work, Stephen Rowe’s (2012) scholarship and its connection to Lasch’s work (1979) is also significant. Both he and Lasch express similar sentiments regarding people’s desire for “instant gratification and competitive individualism” (1979, p. 3). Despite our obsession with social media, tangible goods still provide a kind of gratification that people seek. As President Carter (1979) once said, Americans of the day were focused on “owning things and consuming things,” and this mentality has not ceased beyond the nation’s crisis of confidence. It has merely

transformed as our technology has placated our desires. What we find now, however, is that the *size* of those goods is a more persistent variable. America has grown infatuated with bigger and better. It is no longer enough to own a modest house and accumulate only essentials. It is now essential to increase the number of material items, including a large house in which to place all these items. All of these material things are only a few keyboard strokes away. Our desire to possess materials is now exacerbated by social media whereby we can all make one another jealous (either consciously or subconsciously) and compare our lives to one another when we post pics of our lives. It's like a child's game of musical chairs—everyone vying for a seat, trying to get there before being left out.

Just as the 1970s came to be known as the “me-decade,” 21st century America has managed to maintain an immature, child-like mentality. Finn (2009) proposes that if the 20th century could be classified as the “Century of the Child,” then the 21st century could be called the “Century of the Troubled Child” (p. 58). Today's American moment features the failure of people to resist or reject the master narrative of material wealth and information that often dictates how people and families operate and make decisions (Jayachandiran, Harrison, Afifi, & Davis, 2016). At least, people have not resisted or rejected it consistently. Since George H.W. Bush left office in 1992, the trend is for consumption to increase whenever prices in energy drop. As energy prices soar, we cut back. While we ride up and down on this economic yo-yo, our energy problems and dependence on products and luxury items remain while our futures remain unpredictable (Jacobs, 2016). For instance, the late 1990s featured the rise of sport utility vehicles, which were exempt from C.A.F.E. (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standards. By

2002, these vehicles made up roughly one quarter of the domestic car market (Graetz, 2011) and, by 2005, Americans drove nearly three times the number of miles they had thirty years previously (Jacobs, 2016). Evidently, the dominant cultural mindset of twenty-first century America equates material wealth with prosperity (Jayachandiran et al., 2016). The acquisition of wealth activates a belief in our ability to control our lives, thus influencing the way in which we interpret our existence (Sharma, 2014).

This mentality, arguably, enabled the energy crisis during the 1970s and continues to motivate our ethical behaviors in the current moment. Like the 1970s, Americans today are still critical of government and big business (Uslaner, 2010). At the same time, we are still beholden to these entities, looking for both to assuage our insecurities and provide ourselves with the goods and services that satisfy our egos. Making this relationship more complicated is the mutual effect of both business and the government, as “Powerful lobbyists, both inside and outside government, have distorted an admirable American belief in free enterprise into the right of extremely rich citizens to accumulate and retain more and more wealth” (Carter, 2005, p. 3). Tighter cycles of production enabled by big-business and government interests cause dysfunctional behavior that push us toward therapeutic solutions often manifested through personal technologies that transform us into “cyborg-consumer-citizens” (Sharma, 2014, p. 4). Unlike the 1970s, however, the effects of narcissism today are exacerbated by the element of speed, particularly in the workplace (Sharma, 2014, p. 30). This tendency for increased speed creeps in to all aspects of our lives through advertisements, our technological devices, and the literature that we read (Sharma, 2014).

Instead of clarification, however, we are spoon-fed information that is “neither true nor false but merely credible,” leaving us in a world of “pseudo-events and quasi information” (Lasch, 1979, p. 75). From there, we are lulled into a state of “taken for granted expectations and assumptions” (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016, p. 35). Moving forward, we must ask whether a cure exists for the ethical illnesses that manifested during the 1970s and have now, arguably, metastasized to parts of our society in what has become a hypermodern moment. Inevitably, and as a result of hypermodernity, we are prone to larger-scale disasters and crises that cause significant confusion in the way that we shape our cultures, beliefs, lives, and institutions (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016). Evidence of this has been seen in the twenty-first century. The events of 9/11 resulted in a rethinking of security norms and procedures, while Hurricane Katrina became the most expensive disaster in United States history in 2005 due in part to governmental and bureaucratic infighting that caused a lack of preparedness and action (Seeger and Sellnow, 2016). Now, in 2020, the entire world endures a pandemic outbreak of coronavirus that has halted nearly the entire global economy, and has caused disagreements and mass confusion over how to effectively respond to the crisis. Carter’s “Crisis” speech, while not directly predicting these kinds of events, did suggest that a symptomatic negativity creates national disharmony and an inability to unite against such crises:

For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote. The productivity of American workers is actually

dropping, and the willingness of Americans to save for the future has fallen below that of all other people in the Western world. (Carter, 1979).

Arguably, without a confirmed date, it might be difficult for the average citizen of the United States to distinguish whether this previous remark was spoken today or forty years ago, such is the similarity of sentiment today as in 1979. Today, we have great political and social divisions within our government and, as a result, within our nation in general. Additionally, the effects of narcissism and hypermodernity have led to major departures from our traditional American values (Carter, 2005).

These departures and divisions unleashed a plague on Jimmy Carter's presidency, as the seemingly endless policy stalemates that he faced during similar times of crisis consistently thwarted his efforts to lead effectively. Carter (2005) himself spoke of these difficulties, that attempting to get major legislation passed was often a highly-partisan, unpleasant experience. Other presidents since Carter's time have also endured similar circumstances to varying degrees. Light (1999) designated the relationship between presidents, Congress, and the media as one of constant conflicting interests that manifest as a "no-win presidency." We will examine this concept in the next section, how this situation stalled Carter's presidency, and how Carter attempted to respond.

The "No-Win Presidency": Congressional and Media Relations

According to Light (1999), Carter faced some rather unusual circumstances during his presidency in that, unlike previous administrations that dealt with rather clear-cut issues, his policy agenda "did not arrive with a ready base of constituents—energy, welfare reform, and social security financing were all 'orphans' in the domestic policy process" (p. 215). FDR's clear policy challenge was to stem and reverse the Great

Depression; Lyndon Johnson led during a historical moment in which the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement dominated national discourse. Nixon inherited Vietnam, while Gerald Ford inherited the fallout from Nixon's Watergate scandal. Carter, meanwhile, waded into largely untested waters with no clear-cut issue at the forefront of national attention. Energy, welfare reform, and social security financing "moved to Congress with little interest-group support, minimal public concern, and active bureaucratic resistance" (Light, 1999, p. 215). When discourse pertaining to policy issues is at a low ebb, presidents must decide whether to educate us on issues, or craft policy that is simply most likely to pass. In turn, we must decide which of these two forms of political medicine tastes better (Light, 1999). Ultimately, we look to our presidents to determine a proper course of action and make the best decisions.

According to Rosenman (1976), "The style of operation of a President flows to a great extent from decision-making. Every policy or program is the sum of many decisions, and each President has his own way of arriving at decisions" (p. xix). Meanwhile, the White House staff, often "under intense pressure to limit the span of executive attention . . . is often forced to choose between competing items for the President's agenda" (Light, 1999, p. 1). Their choices, in many cases, depend upon the president's communicative relations with Congress. Yet, members of congress tend to be motivated by their own interests, and either vote for or against a president's policy proposals according to personal preference and whether their vote might lead to re-election. All of these competing interests create giant barriers for presidents to hurdle (Lee, 2008).

Therefore, “the way presidents talk about legislation and talk to members of Congress matters” (Villalobos, et al., 2012, p. 550). A president must not only be clear but also concise, since they only have a small window of time in which to enact policy. Thus, Presidents “must often choose between careful planning and congressional success, [and] the only point at which both cycles are mutually compatible is at the start of the second term” (Light, 1999, p. 203). Given Carter’s advantage of a Democratic majority in both the House and Senate throughout his tenure, and given the inability of Congress to pass substantive portions of Carter’s energy legislation, the obvious question of whether Carter failed Congress or vice versa, or whether something else entirely caused the impasse, must be addressed.

Lee (2008) posits, “When a president takes a position on an issue, it creates a benchmark for measuring his and his party’s effectiveness” (p. 915). The Republican revolution initiated by Reagan in 1980 would appear to reflect badly upon the Democratic Party on the whole in this case. Eizenstat (2018) offers some thoughts on the matter, stating, “When a nation and its leaders cannot face up to the truth about their challenges . . . it is difficult to develop sensible policies” (p. 139). The president and Democrats, in general, could be accused of this. Yet, what Carter and Congress separately attempted to accomplish during the 1970s was akin to remodeling a house while cleaning it at the same time. Carter attempted to remodel the government, while Congress was preoccupied with cleaning up the mess made by previous administrations. The resulting situation for Carter was a No-Win presidency. Light (1999) outlines the No-Win Presidency in the following manner:

“The growth of this No-Win Presidency is a 1970s phenomenon. It was kindled by a series of presidential misjudgments, most notably the War in Vietnam and Watergate, and was fueled by a string of congressional reactions, the most important of which were the War Powers Resolution and the Budget and Impoundment Control Act (see Greenstein 1978) . . . Presidents are increasingly caught in a political vise. They are cross-pressured from a number of angles, with little opportunity for release.” (p. 205)

Both the War Powers Resolution and the Impoundment Control Act were crafted in direct response to Nixon’s attempt to assert presidential power and control. The nation’s government, along with its people, remained skeptical of the presidency, and Carter, though acting on a moral high-level, fell under the weight of intense scrutiny.

In addition to presenting the basic premise of the No-Win Presidency, Light (1999) offers five, detailed elements that undergird it: 1) It “rests partly on the backlog of legislation left after the Nixon and Ford years, a backlog created by legislative stalemate, and partly on changes in the congressional environment”; 2) In Washington, “the domestic policy process has continued to fragment, thereby increasing legislative complexity”; 3) Chief Executives “now face a significant drop in their potential influence in Congress”; 4) Also, and once again, in the aftermath of Watergate, “Presidents must now operate in an environment of increasing surveillance”; 5) Lastly, “and perhaps most important, the domestic issues have changed” (pp. 205-206). Curiously, despite Light’s consistent allusion to Nixon and Ford and Carter’s attempt to reform the presidency in response to the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations, Carter ultimately downplayed the extent to which those administrations, particularly Nixon’s actually hurt the nation. In

a 1980 interview, Carter insisted that too many media members “feel that most public officials, Presidents, members of Congress, governors, mayors, are untrustworthy and that their word of honor is doubtful, and that their good intentions are not to be trusted” (pp. 40-41). Based on this position, one must wonder whether Carter might have underestimated the nation’s reaction to Watergate, and whether, had he not done so, his relationships with Congress and the media may have yielded more fruit.

Instead, Carter surged ahead, somewhat neglectful of those relationships. Upon taking the Oath of Office, he determined to put a comprehensive energy policy in place within 90 days, and “true to his word, less than three months after his inauguration, the new president gave his first major national address on what he saw as a looming crisis” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 137). From the start, Carter outlined his initiatives, at least in broad terms. Yet, perhaps unbeknownst to him, he had stepped into a Congressional minefield, “not fully aware of the political lineup of competing interests. . . . The Senate barons wrangled for home-state advantages,” while the House and Senate committees “fought for a year to reconcile differences” (Eizenstat, 2018, pp. 139-140; p. 179). Complicating matters more, much of the public failed to agree with Carter that a crisis was imminent. The 1973 crisis had passed, and Americans were content with their energy situation the way it was. The cavalier attitude reflects Niebuhr’s understanding that a problem with society is humans’ tendency to succumb to their egos in a rather personal quest for survival. Even the members of our own government, despite their ascendancy to power on the shoulders of the electorate, can consciously and subconsciously eschew the needs of the people in favor of vested interests.

Granted, in turn, the policy views of Congress are also shaped by their impressions and attitudes toward a sitting president, and rhetorical cues are interpreted differently by Congressional members (Lee, 2008). Unfortunately for Carter, “he was so determined to confront intractable problems” that, to both Congress and the nation, he “came away at times seeming like a public scold—a nanny telling her charges to eat their spinach” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 2). Stillion-Southard and Wolvin (2009) make the argument that “although Carter demonstrated that he was a listener and leader, he failed to show that he was a *listening leader* (p. 142). They maintain that, while presidents must listen to the people, they must also effectively communicate a vision that “can withstand the ever-changing winds of public opinion” (Stillion-Southard and Wolvin, 2009, p. 145). Drawing a conclusion from this argument, Carter needed to listen closely to the people, but also to elevate himself by exhibiting extraordinary characteristics. In that way, he would assume the role of a “transformational listening leader” (Stillion-Southard and Wolvin, 2009, p. 145). The authors also argue that listening leadership “is a necessary component to begin to formulate a vision, but leaders must continue to listen in order to revise and reconsider their vision. The listening process is dynamic and ongoing” (Stillion-Southard and Wolvin, 2009, p. 148). They suggest that, in the end, this is where Carter’s leadership deficiencies emerged.

However, a counterpoint must be made. Must not a leader, at some point, cease to listen and simply lead? There must be an instance whereby listening must turn to action. Both Stillion-Southard and Wolvin maintain that Carter’s request for help from the nation in the “Crisis” speech, and his subsequent discussion of planned policy implementations only achieved mixed success post-speech. They further suggest that the “flaw with

Carter's arrangement [of the speech] concerns his desire to show that he listened" (Stillion-Southard and Wolvin, 2009, p. 149). They argue that his presentation of solutions to the issue, delayed until later in the speech, suggest a weakness of leadership. Their argument is a contradiction. On one hand, the authors suggest that Carter failed to listen appropriately; on the other, they then criticize him for his admission of listening.

The belief here is that Carter's rhetorical problems were not caused by a failure to listen appropriately. An argument could be made that, had the nation, the Congress, and the special interest groups taken Carter more seriously in 1977 when he had insisted that energy was of primary importance for domestic policy, the 1979 crisis may have been avoided. However, this also captures the essential problem that the Carter administration faced, as "the national agenda in the late 1970s was full of complex problems with politically unpopular solutions" (Strong, 1986, p. 638). Carter inherited a laundry list of issues when he took office and, when he attempted to address the issues, he ran into resistance. Now, the nation and the government blamed him for a supposed lack of leadership. Carter did not lack leadership. What he, arguably, may have lacked was an effective means of expressing himself and conveying his messages consistently.

It was Pat Caddell who attempted to shed light on this primary issue for Carter—that his administration had lost touch with the people, and he had been more content to manage rather than lead (Strong, 1986). In Caddell's words, "too many good people have been defeated because they tried to substitute substance for style. . . . They forgot to give the public the kind of visible symbols that it needs to understand what is happening" (Strong, 1986, p. 641; Caddell, 1977). Before 1979, Carter's administration had functioned by way of a "spokes of the wheel" approach, whereby Carter received advice

from a bevy of sources “without establishing a hierarchy of presidential assistants between himself and his advisers” (Strong, 1986, p. 642). While this form of leadership placated Carter’s desire to be at the center of the storm, so to speak, it often failed to serve his political interests (Strong, 1986).

It remains interesting to note the perceptions of Carter from those who worked with him and those in the media and the general public who observed him from afar. Those who worked closely with him believed the President to be an “intelligent, well-informed, self-confident” leader who made difficult and, oftentimes, unpopular but necessary choices. Ironically, despite the many tough decisions he made, the enduring perception of Carter is that of an indecisive president (Strong, 1986). Aiding the narrative of indecisiveness was a series of articles penned by Carter’s former speech writer, James Fallows and published in 1979. Fallows argued that, while the President was quite intelligent and capable, he failed to foresee the more widespread political consequences of his decisions for the country. By 1979, Carter’s image needed a serious refit (Strong, 1986). The image already in place was established, in part, by the media, an establishment with which Carter’s relationship tended toward the acrimonious.

Eshbaugh-Soha and McGauvran (2018) maintain, “The interrelationship between news media and the presidency has been a constant source of scholarly examination” (p. 157). Presidents tend to find it difficult leading the news agenda through their rhetoric alone, particularly given the number of increasing news outlets and an ever more fragmented news audience. In 2020, presidents simply have less control over the news media and the stories on which they report (Eshbaugh-Sola and McGauvran, 2018). While it is an overstatement to suggest that the relationship between presidents and the

media are always adversarial (Paletz and Entman, 1980; Locander, 1979), it is still often problematic for both. The press's point of emphasis makes for a strained dynamic between it and the president, for the American media thrives on conflict. According to Maltese (1994), "Communications experts often note that the media are preoccupied with conflict, [and] by the media's own definition, news is drama, and drama thrives on conflict" (p. 1; Paletz and Entman, 1981, p. 16). In Carter's case, his legislative impasses with Congress combined with power struggles amongst members of his staff enabled the media to fan the flames of these two-sided conflicts, thereby contriving a "chorus of dismay and dissolution" that helped drag down his administration (Paletz and Entman, 1980, p. 422). Yet, the flames were also fanned by some calculated errors on the part of Carter and his staff (Paletz and Entman, 1980). Granted, while they proved costly in the long run, they were made by Carter in an attempt to fix the mistakes made by previous administrations.

Ironically, despite Jimmy Carter's "deep distrust—even dislike—of the media," the image of him as a wholesome, faith-driven candidate who could restore honor to the Presidency was, by and large, a creation *of* the media (Maltese, 1994, p. 149). Carter preferred substance above style, yet his personal style helped get him elected. It was also his style that, strangely, caused the end of his presidency (Maltese, 1994). In the early days of his term, Carter remained "remarkably accessible to the press." He held frequent press conferences and consistently made himself available to the local Washington media (Maltese, 1994, p. 149). Carter was even quite innovative in the manner though which he communicated with the press and the public. He engaged in town meetings, participated in "talk to the president" sessions with Walter Cronkite and others, and delivered brief

statements on issues and topics rather than long televised addresses (Paletz and Entman, 1980, p. 422). In a sense, it was Carter who pioneered the concept of the “tweet” years before the technology was available to President Trump and the other politicians who now regularly use the format.

Where Carter’s use of the media faltered, however, was his administration’s failure to consider the modern presidency as an extension of a political campaign, in which, “The president must set the agenda, maintain discipline among his spokespeople, and orchestrate media coverage of that agenda through long term public relations planning” (Maltese, 1994, p. 150). For Carter, once elected, the campaign ended and governing began. However, when it comes to the media, perception is everything. The media’s perception of Carter changed from an image of a president with a bold vision to that of an indecisive, out of his element, flawed leader. Where presidents can prevent such a change is in the communicative efforts of the entire White House staff. Messages and agenda must be clearly communicated so that all parties involved speak with one, unified voice regarding policy issues (Maltese, 1994).

This failure hurt Carter, especially early in his presidency, as little control over what his cabinet officials relayed to the press was maintained (Maltese, 1994). A primary cause of this situation was Carter’s promise of an open administration, which only encouraged “White House aides and cabinet officers to argue for their policy positions in the press, [and] to express their disagreements publicly” (Paletz and Entman, 1980, p. 423). The media and, therefore, the American people were left with an exaggerated image of their president as “indecisive, stubborn, [and] unable to control events or command obedience” (Paletz and Entman, 1980, p. 423). Subsequently, the national media

portrayed President Carter as indecisive and inept, and the American people, inevitably, bought into the narrative (Strong, 1986). However, it is only fair, and must be stated, that Carter's insistence upon an open administration came about in response to the Nixon administration's abusive practices of regularly punishing, excluding, and evading the press (Paletz and Entman, 1980).

It is only unfortunate that it took Carter and his staff too long to recognize that "they were dealing with a Washington press corps stung into suspicion by the official deceptions of Vietnam and Watergate" (Paletz and Entman, 1980, p. 423). It, therefore, behooves future presidents to be mindful of history and its effects, not only on Congress, but also on the American people. Failure to consider historical perspective can, inevitably, lead to future conflicts, both personal and organizational. For Maltese (1994), "Stories about real conflicts increase the tension between those at odds and make the president look like a poor manager" (p. 2; footnote, p. 255, *Imperial Media*, p. 89). Therefore, the White House staff must "aggressively promote the messages that it wants conveyed to the American people. To state it bluntly, the White House must manipulate media coverage of the administration" if it wants the administration to look good in the eyes of the public (Maltese, 1994, p. 2).

The responsibility for maintaining a positive image of the presidency "rests with the White House Office of Communications, whereby the goal is to set the public agenda, to make sure that all parts of the presidential team (the White House staff, cabinet officers, and other executive branch officials) are adhering to that public agenda, and to aggressively promote that agenda through a form of mass marketing" (Maltese, 1994, p. 2). "It was Nixon who created the White House Office of Communications, and every

president after him has ultimately felt compelled to embrace it” (Maltese, 1994, p. 3). In Carter’s case, it was believed by some in his staff that his preference to hold up in solitude and become as well-informed on the issues as possible was detrimental to his success. Instead, those close to the President insisted that he should focus more attention meeting more with his Cabinet and members of Congress and setting the agenda, thereby enabling a chance to earn more positive press (Eizenstat, 2018).

For presidents, helping to lead the nation and pass policy has become more and more of a public relations initiative. This is evidenced by the White House’s increasing embrace of public relations techniques, which has also “corresponded with an increasing dependence on public support for the implementation of presidential policy” (Maltese, 1994, p. 3). Increasingly, since the middle part of the twentieth century, the public has emerged as “a president’s most visible source of ongoing political power” (Maltese, 1994, p. 4). Ironically, this is exactly what the Founders of the nation had hoped to avoid. While they understood “that public consent was a requirement of republican government, they nonetheless felt that the processes of government should be insulated from the whims of public opinion” (Maltese, 1994, p. 4). So, what we now have is a situation that the founders never anticipated, an evolution in our democracy brought about largely by a rhetorical response to rapidly evolving technology that has altered the rhetorical situation. Also, ironically, despite this evolution of technologies, practices, and role of the presidency, government adheres to a fixed constitution.

As the public grows ever more influential to a president’s success, presidents must cultivate the power of an enlarged audience by keeping strong, professional relationships with members of the media, which, like the public, has also grown in power

and reach (Maltese, 1994). Past presidents knew how to successfully manage relations with the press, beginning with Theodore Roosevelt, who was the first president to truly use the fourth branch of government for political advantage (Maltese, 1994). Following Roosevelt's lead, Woodrow Wilson established the tradition of the regularly scheduled presidential press conference, and from there "the new system of presidential press relations was perfected by Franklin D. Roosevelt, who formerly created the White House Press Office" (Maltese, 1994, p. 4). Coincidentally, all three men, like Carter, were former state governors with no political experience inside Washington D.C. Yet, Carter, unlike them, only served one term as president.

What makes for this inconsistency? Carter's rhetorical strategies in dealing with the press, combined with his inexperience and misjudgment of the D.C. political establishment, might be a reasonable answer. Allen and Weber (1983) suggest that presidents today take for granted that they need to shape public opinion toward policy through the media. Returning to Theodore Roosevelt, who used the bully pulpit to great success in his dealings with the media, "assumed a demarcation of authority and wisdom between the two sides of the pulpit" (Lim, 2008, p. 46). Roosevelt was the embodiment of a Jeremiad preacher, and metaphorically established himself as "the wise and anointed seer of things to come" (Lim, 2008, p. 46; Bercovitch, 1978; Burgchardt, 1992). Carter's rhetoric was inspired by his Evangelical background, and, like Roosevelt, he assumed a preacher-like role when engaging in public speaking. Like a preacher, Also, like Roosevelt, Carter often made it his job "to articulate a message from God, often harsh and unpalatable, as a warning or plan for things to come" (Lim, 2008, p. 46). Roosevelt believed that taking unpopular positions, and even muckraking in certain instances, was

essential to the job of president, thereby promoting the greater good of society (Lim, 2008, p. 46). This belief is mirrored in the “Crisis” speech, as Carter plainly states, “This is not a message of happiness or reassurance, but it is the truth and it is a warning” (Carter, 1979). Given the connection between the two presidents, it could be suggested that Carter, in many ways, attempted to take up Roosevelt’s mantle.

Therefore, what may have ultimately hurt Carter was his political inexperience in dealing with both Congress and the media. It is Eizenstat (2018) who confesses, “He [Carter] never attended Georgetown social events, and almost never asked Washington insiders to the White House for a quiet chat or social engagement” (p. 678). Though he was governor of Georgia and member of the State Senate, he arguably failed to realize the difference between leading a state and leading a nation. The differences, along with the changing Washington D.C. power structures between the president, Congress, the media, and the public, can create a no-win presidency. However, Light (1999) offers eight possible remedies for presidents caught up in this situation:

1. Move it or lose it— “the domestic agenda must move quickly.”
2. Learning must wait—Presidents “are more successful if they adopt an on-the-job-training strategy.
3. Take the first alternative— “Presidents are encouraged to take the first alternative which meets the search criteria; once that first alternative is found, the search for other options should be abandoned”
4. No innovations— “Presidents are encouraged to take the available programs, not the novel solutions”

5. Avoid details— “It is to the President’s advantage to leave the substance of legislation to his staff. The President must supply the general audience; the staff must provide the specialization.”
6. Reelection comes first— “Presidents must move their programs quickly if they are to compete within the legislative process.”
7. No cabinet government— Cabinet government “places heavy demands on the President and absorbs heavy amounts of White House resources.”
8. Beware the spokes of the wheel— “Presidents must also be careful about too much internal delegation.” (pp. 218-225)

Light postulates these eight remedies largely in response to Carter’s presidency.

Ultimately, he argues against amateurs who are unfamiliar with the practices, traditions, and styles relevant to governing in Washington (1999). Light makes the case that “expertise involves more than office-holding, [therefore] we would expect national political figures to have greater exposure to the legislative process than state or local officials” (1999, p. 232). Thus, if Carter was guilty of anything, it was not paying closer attention to the unwritten rules of the Washington D.C. game and adapting his style accordingly to get the results he sought. Had he learned from the lessons of recent history and surrounded himself with people who could advise of those lessons, outcomes may have been different for him (Fallows, 1979). Still, even as late as the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, there was still time for Carter to save his presidency, yet he faced a third implication that may have hindered his “Crisis of Confidence” speech, one that has stretched into the new millennium and affected presidential leadership—the anti-intellectual presidency (Lim, 2008).

The Problem of Anti-Intellectualism in Speechmaking

In *The Anti-Intellectual Presidency*, Elvin Lim (2008) distinguishes between intellect and intelligence in presidential speechmaking. Part of the difference is “not the fact that presidents talk a lot, but that they say very little even when they talk a lot” (p. 9). Lim asks how, from both an audience and a speechmaker’s perspective, we might “redirect our attention toward the quality, rather than the quantity, of presidential rhetoric” (p. 19). He references Hofstadter (1963), who argued that intellect “is the critical, creative, and contemplative side of mind . . . Intelligence will seize the immediate meaning in a situation and evaluate it. Intellect evaluates evaluations” (p. 7). Carter embodied this difference between intelligence and intellect. Though he possessed high levels of both, he used the latter to craft the “Crisis of Confidence” address and present it to the nation. By evaluating the responses of those with whom he visited at the Camp David summit, as well as the scholarship of Lasch, Bellah, and Bell, Carter actively engaged in intellectual qualitative work.

Prior to July 15, 1979, the date of Carter’s “Crisis” speech, anxiety had largely turned the nation against him. The sense of resentment caused by that anxiety had even filtered down to his own political party, and in the run-up to the 1980 primaries, fifty-three percent of Democrats had decided that they preferred Senator Edward Kennedy to Carter as the party’s presidential nominee (Strong, 1986). Carter’s hold on the nomination was quite tenuous, as both Kennedy’s challenge for the nomination and Carter’s approval ratings, lower than Richard Nixon’s during Watergate, would attest (Strong, 1986). Additionally, the President was not only trying to subdue a volatile economy and a challenge from a popular member of the Democratic Party, but was also

navigating new and unusual issues abroad. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, referred to by Eizenstat (2018) as “the most profound geopolitical event of the twentieth century’s postwar period, except for the fall of the Soviet Union,” would ultimately test the Carter presidency in ways that no other president had been tested before (p. 719). In what would be a recurrent theme of the Carter administration, a bevy of unusual and unforeseen circumstances created a hurricane of problems to which no easy or clear-cut solution existed, and Carter would absorb the lion’s share of blame because of it.

Retrospectively, Carter himself once observed, “When things go bad you get entirely too much blame. And I have to admit that when things go good, you get entirely too much credit” (p. 47, footnote 29, p. 64: Quoted in Godfrey, Hodgson, *All Things to All Men: The False Promise of the Modern American Presidency*). Carter was most certainly pragmatic in his perspective on leadership, and that balanced perspective enabled him to admit faults as well as take credit for success. His penitent tone permeated the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, as he did what many political leaders often fail to do—acknowledge their failings and set out to make changes (Strong, 1986). Of course, critics took Carter’s admissions and framed them as weakness, arguing that he failed to deliver a satisfying address by failing to detail his accomplishments, only focusing instead on the negatives of the situation (Kohrs Campbell and Hall Jamieson, 1990).

In the aftermath of the national address, the media “had a field day” with the “Crisis of Confidence” speech, depicting it as overly pessimistic and, further, suggesting that Carter had blamed Americans for his problems (Maltese, 1994, p. 169). Yet, in reality, Carter was delivering a tough message to Americans that they might not have wanted to hear (Eizenstat, 2018). Further, and perhaps not mentioned by the critics,

Carter, while suggesting that individuals' energy consumption was part of the problem, also made the case that individual choice was also part of the solution (Allen and Weber, 1983). Carter had done the job of analyzing what he perceived to be the nation's problems, based on an examination of the opinions and viewpoints of people in all walks of life. He agreed with the theory, largely postulated by Lasch (1979), that Americans had resigned themselves to living lives of narcissism. Yet, he also offered Americans a pathway to restoring their "sense of unity," their "confidence in the future," their "sense of purpose" (Carter, 1979). Carter rhetorically called upon the country to act, to alter its practices, and to commit itself to a new future.

For Lim (2008), "Such activities as criticizing, examining, and theorizing are the second-order mental operations that are the life and trade of intellectuals and those who live the life of the mind" (p. 21). Carter was an intellectual whose thought processes were often "derided by the anti-intellectual as too complex, recondite, and sophistic" (Lim, 2008, p. 21). This is the basis for the anti-intellectual presidency, which Lim (2008) describes as a "hostile stance toward the ostensibly complex processes and products of the mind (intellect), often accompanied by a celebration of its supposedly simple and everyday functions (intelligence)" (p. 22). Lim (2008) argues that "a radical institutional transformation [known] as the anti-intellectual presidency [has] crept up on us" (p. 41). By the 1970s, scholarship in the area of delegated speechwriting had dwindled, and presidents had grown increasingly reliant upon speechwriters to relay their rhetorical messages to the public. Yet, these speechwriters "craft speeches that shield, rather than reflect, the true rhetorical identity of presidents from their audiences" (Lim, 2008, p. 43). Arguably, this has occurred in part due to the changing technologies with which speeches

are now relayed to audiences, technologies that focus the magnifying lens ever so tightly on the speaker.

Far even before Carter's time, Roosevelt's bully pulpit had gone out of fashion, and while Roosevelt and Wilson helped inaugurate the rhetorical presidency (Tulis, 2017), the anti-intellectual presidency rules today, and exists as "a very different beast" altogether (Lim, 2008, p. 46). For starters, the mediums are different. Presidents engage the public through television and live-stream internet more often today than they do in-person, which was more the norm during Roosevelt's and Wilson's time (Lim, 2008). We see the effects of technology, whereby presidents either learn to embrace it and adapt well to it, or fall victim to it. Lyndon Johnson failed to sound elegant when speaking, but his speech was correct (Lim, 2008; McPherson, 2002); Nixon 'was an intellectual who pretended not to be' (Lim, 2008; Price, 2002); Regan presented himself as 'the man next door,' posing as a visiting citizen (Lim, 2008; Matthews, 1988, p. 219); Surprisingly, George W. Bush, whose presidential rhetoric has endured ridicule, was actually attentive to detail and subtlety (Lim, 2008, p. 43). Each of these presidents, as well as others since, have continued the tradition of the anti-intellectual presidency by embracing rhetorical simplicity in an underestimation of their audience (Lim, 2008).

Richard Neustadt (2003) also "added his voice to this chorus, championing 'simple eloquence' and diagnosing the cause of . . . rhetorical problems" (Lim, 2008, pp. 44-45). He argued that presidential speeches are "all written by people with academic degrees, and academic degrees are ruinous for the use of Anglo-Saxon sentence structures" (Lim, 2008, pp. 44-45; Neustadt, 2003). Lim argues that we must combat this philosophy of anti-intellectualism, so that we might "stand a greater chance of finding

leaders who satisfy the democratic citizen's demand for public leadership and who also refuse to coddle us with vacuous talk" (2008, p. 12). He blames presidents, speechwriters, and scholars who, in their own way have contributed to the dilemma, suggesting that anti-intellectualism in presidential rhetoric "it is a problem that we must confront head on (2008, p. 9). In what follows as a disagreement of perception, the manner by which Jimmy Carter addressed anti-intellectualism in his rhetoric, particularly the "Crisis of Confidence" address will be discussed.

Lim accuses presidents of deferring to their speechwriters far too frequently, and indicates Carter as a case in point. He references Hendrik Hertzberg (1981), Carter's chief speechwriter at the time, who suggests that Carter "never worked in any consistent way or directly with the people who wrote his speeches" (Lim, 2008; Hertzberg, p. 1). Further, Lim calls Carter's contribution to the speech "minimal," with his main contribution being "a series of quotations from political and civic leaders that appeared at the beginning of the final version of the speech, and a partial draft of just 500 words in a speech that eventually took 3600 words" (Lim, 2008, p. 86; Carter, 1979 [2]). The argument against Lim's position here, however, two-fold.

Firstly, while the "Crisis" address had been pieced together from a number of writers, namely Hertzberg, Eizenstat, Gerald Rafshoon, and Patrick Caddell, Carter drove its creation, continually suggesting and approving content. He "made detailed comments on the energy section [of the speech] and urged the writers 'to be politically bold and challenging' in setting national goals" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 688). When writers had removed the harsher rhetoric that pertained to the nation's energy-consuming practices, Carter insisted they restore it (Eizenstat, 2018). This was an effort to maintain an

appropriate amount of pathos, in addition to rationale. Finally, what was perhaps Carter's most effective line from the speech— "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" (Carter, 1979)—could've been "lifted from Jimmy Carter's Sunday-school class in Plains (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 690). The efforts of the speechwriters, under the direction of an engaged and determined president, resulted in, easily, President Carter's most memorable and significant address.

Secondly, Carter's efforts increased the credibility of the speech. Given his statement "As President, I need your help" (Carter, 1979), he invited the American people to join the conversation during the speech, as he had prior to the speech when, at Camp David he had received "frank advice" from whom he had considered "the best thinkers in our society and also average citizens" (Carter, 2010, p. 341). This is a further example of his leadership, and it boosted the ethos and logos of the speech, two elements that Lin maintains have declined in the anti-intellectual presidency (2008).

Evaluation

The energy crises of 1973 and 1979 marked a crossroads in American ethics whereby American society was faced with a choice between conservation and consumerism. In *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s*, author Meg Jacobs (2017) chronicles the history of the crises, their political and economic causes, and their immediate and lingering effects. She considers the '73 and '79 crises as one crisis based on the "sense that it happened all at once," despite the various ebbs and flows within that six-year period (Jacobs, 2017, p. 3).

Enter Jimmy Carter and the election of 1976. This “outsider” promised Americans that he would restore the White House to respectability following the scandal-ridden Vietnam and Watergate years. Further, Carter recommended more government assistance to quell recession and inflation, which sat well with those needing financial relief (Johnstone, 1978). By the mid-1970s, millions of Americans were out of work, and Carter’s promise of government intervention still resonated with those who aligned philosophically with Roosevelt’s New Deal (Jacobs, 2017). Like Roosevelt, Carter attempted to restore the American public’s faith and hope in its future.

The future of which Carter spoke is now part of the nation’s past, and we must continue to evaluate how we view presidential leadership in the twenty-first century. Any successful president, must prove himself successful of navigating and operating the mechanism that has become the Washington D.C. political machine, no matter to which social, political, or philosophical side he leans (Rosenman, 1976). According to Strong (1986) the “process of self-criticism and reform may tell us something about what presidential leadership is and whether or not it can be willed into existence” (p. 637). Strong (1986) also makes three astute observations and asks one poignant question regarding the nature of presidential leadership (pp. 647-648):

1. Do presidents who confront difficult issues earn popular support or spend it?
2. When a president deals with long-term problems . . . that have costly domestic solutions, it is not at all clear that he will gain popular acclaim for addressing such issues.

3. When reporters stand on the White House lawn announcing foreign disasters or gloomy economic statistics, they leave the impression that the president is to blame.
4. Presidents, if they are not Teflon-coated, become the symbols of the accumulated misfortune of their times.

Strong also claims that Carter's actions in 1979, more specifically, his "Crisis of Confidence" speech, "leave a legacy of important questions about what is meant by presidential leadership and how it is to be exercised in an era of seemingly intractable domestic and foreign policy problems" (p. 649). Carter, entering the White House on a platform of reform and nationwide self-assessment of its practices. His attitude and style mirrored the manner in which he functioned, thereby influencing both his successes and failures (Rosenman, 1976).

As for style and attitude, Carter proved demanding of his staff, but he was reluctant to "punish or fire staff members or cabinet officers who failed to serve him well" (p. 643). Perhaps this generosity is suggestive of a faith-based leadership, whereby Carter enacted grace. The focus on grace in Niebuhr's scholarship was propelled by Martin Buber's concept of the I-Thou relationship (Halliwell, 2005). The Thou is achieved through grace, not through seeking, and knowledge is achieved not through a mastery or a possession of others but through an ethical bond between the self and the Other (Halliwell, 2005).

Carter needed plenty of grace, for he was tasked with running "a vast, complex, and intricate operation, extending over the entire world" (Rosenman, 1976). Despite his strong will, and his ethical sentimentalities, Carter was often at the mercy of an evolving

nation, yet ever trying to follow a set of guidelines developed in a distinct era. Perhaps, Burns (1976) states it best:

But almost at the dawn of the present century the ferment of reform, the projection of the United States into the imperial theatre, the impact of depression, the hypertrophy of the cities, the enormous demands of world wars, and the heightened expectations of the voters combined with the easy promise-making of office-seekers—all combined to put an eighteenth-century constitution under enormous stress.” (p. xi)

Rosenman (1976) adds to this thought, suggesting that the American Presidency “is a unique institution in the history of civilization” (p. xv). Nothing quite like it had existed before its creation, and it remains relatively unique in that other countries have not duplicated the office in exactly the same way. Therefore, our American President must utilize his own style in attempting to tackle problems in historical moments unlike any before he took office (Rosenman, 1976). Conversely, the American public would be wise to alter some of its expectations of its presidents. Having done so might have aided Carter in accomplishing more of his goals. According to Light (1999), “Presidents must be rewarded for patience, not haste; for planning, not short-term success. What is needed is a fundamental change in how we view the policy process” (p. 233). There is no doubt that Carter, in this sense, was dealing with an impatient nation, and failed to meet its expectation of expediency.

Both the Carter and Reagan administrations reflect a certain fickleness within the American heart. Americans looked to each leader for solutions to the country’s problems, yet Americans aligned themselves with the kind of leadership that rewards a sense of the

entitled and encourages the behaviors that Lasch and Bellah describe. As Mattson (2009a) states, “Looking back now, the malaise speech indicates a turning point in our history. . . . The age of conservatism—from Reagan’s 1980 election up through the end of George W. Bush’s second term—[was] framed not by Carter’s tones of humility but by celebratory nationalism” (p. 16). A similar sense of nationalism has reemerged during the Trump administration, further revealing the rather fragile state of the nation.

Stephen C. Rowe (2012) reflects on America’s current state, referring to it as “curious human silence, distressing technology, an environment of radical uncertainty, and unpredictable thumps” (p. 3). He further suggests that America resides at the front edge of modernity, which has become a global way of life and revolves around the rationalization and quantification of everything (2012). Rowe (2012) appears to be expanding on Lasch’s and Bellah’s scholarship on narcissism and individualism. Rowe (2012) insists that, today, much of the nation has been “eclipsed” by modernity, a moment created by and shared by all societies on the planet (p. 4). He advocates that America must acknowledge the value of its traditions while also retaining the valuable elements of modernity and globalization (Rowe, 2012). Carter in his “Crisis” speech, also advocated for a retention of more traditional sensibilities, and a “restoration of American values” (Carter, 1979). Granted, determining which elements and sensibilities to retain would, most likely, require more research and more shared discussion, especially since the word “tradition” tends to be a sensitive one, and an often misunderstood one, in today’s historical moment.

Through this, though, perhaps the milieu of the 1970s that Lasch and Bellah critiqued may possibly be overcome and a new age with ethics and narrative at its

forefront may be realized. With this in mind, Rowe (2012) offers us hope for the nation's future, suggesting, "America should not be underestimated. The genius of America is overcoming" (p. 3). However, he also offers a caveat, a new hurdle for America to jump—that American needs now to overcome itself (Rowe, 2012). This certainly creates a challenging conundrum for future generations to solve. How can we attempt to restore the covenants that bound our institutions and traditions together?

Bellah (1992) writes, "Always in the background and occasionally in the foreground [is] the notion that the world itself is in need of reform and rebirth" (p. 10). He further designates a particular aspect of reality that people *must* face: that covenants are inevitably broken at one point or another (Arnett, 2010). This is often due to the duplicitous nature of humanity in which "the best and the worst in society or an individual are often closely related" (Bellah, 1992, p. 63). There is often a fine line between how we behave and how we respond to our and others' behaviors. Americans responded to the energy crisis of the 1970s by failing to acknowledge its predilection for individualism and, instead, embracing neo-liberal capitalism. We are now experiencing many ill effects of that choice. However, we now have a choice in how we respond to the issues of today's historical moment. We can accept the tenuous nature of an uncertain outcome and, despite the understanding that nothing is certain, can "roll up [our] sleeves and work to right problematic issues" with the knowledge that the task may never be completed (Arnett, 2010, p. 231).

An appreciation of the work that is involved in attempting to restore a broken covenant is essential (Arnett, 2010). Otherwise, we attempt to manipulate and control our certainties, attempting to create an existence out of the sum of our collected objects

(Arnett, 2010). The problem is not that we need to be rid of control, but finding a new manner of control that will allow for a greater freedom within the institution (Bellah, 1992). Bellah insists that a recognition of a broken covenant does not suggest a rejection of an institution's past. Rather, it reaffirms the need for institutions' members to accept that they are not innocent nor are they the saviors of humankind. Therefore, together, we must "pick up the broken pieces [and try] to start again. . . . That too is part of our tradition" (Bellah, 1992, pp. 141-142). Therefore, perhaps taking one final cue from President Carter, by altering our practices we can "rekindle our sense of unity, our confidence in the future, and give our nation and all of us individually a new sense of purpose" (Carter, 1979). Given the current political, environmental, and social unrest in America, it may be wise to revisit and reconsider Carter's words.

Conclusion

Sorensen (1975) points to Thomas Jefferson as a leader who knew that, while president, he was merely a "temporary servant of the people" (p. 48). He recognized that his time in office was destined to pass quickly. Therefore, modern presidents, knowing that their time in office is temporary, must quickly "earn genuine respect through [their] actions lest a still larger segment of the public turn on [them]" (Sorensen, 1975, p. 48). This proves difficult, given the propensity for the media and, subsequently, the public to magnify a president's weaknesses while his strengths are minimized (Sorensen, 1975). To combat this, a president's communication must be impeccable. He must remain rhetorically flexible when dealing with Congress, the media, and the American people, and how effectively a president navigates these relationships often determines success. The goals set, the actions taken, and the reasons for them must be clear to everyone, in

every institution of American society. Without clarity and singularity of focus, a president runs the risk of losing the nation's respect.

Clarity was a defining strength of Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign in 1976, and there was never any doubt of his primary goal. Carter wanted to reform the presidency and earn back the nation's trust. To a country wounded by deceit, Carter promised he would never lie, and this, more than perhaps any other action, had the greatest impact on his election (Eizenstat, 2018). Many who supported the confident, yet soft-spoken, peanut farmer from Georgia believed that he represented a new alternative to "the tired formulas of left and right" (Fallows, 1979, p. 35). This sense of hope and faith fueled the early days of Carter's term, as a nation eager to be led in a new political direction turned to him in anticipation of what was to come (Fallows, 1979).

Carter's honeymoon period was short-lived, however, and he was quickly besieged by unenviable and unusual circumstances at home and abroad. Additionally, the nation's fickle press that had initially supported him, gradually turned against him and began spinning a narrative that the nation's forty-ninth president was an indecisive and weak leader (Fallows, 1979). Admittedly, certain facts of the day helped support the narrative. By 1979, inflation had risen to thirteen percent as America stood in the midst of a recession. Contributing to the recession were sluggish Iranian oil exports, which resulted in stalled gasoline lines and rationed odd and even purchasing days. Carter was tasked with responding to these situations, all the while experiencing an increasing swell of negative bias (Rosenman, 1976).

His approach was very cut-and-dry. A comment made by Schneiders (1988) effectively encapsulates Jimmy Carter's modus operandi throughout his term in office.

He states:

“Jimmy Carter came to office with the view that there were right ways and wrong ways to do things in this country—there were good policies and bad policies, and that governing well was largely a matter of discerning the right policies through hard work and close study, and then persuading others that these were the right policies. I think he often felt frustrated that the media did not seem to want to be very cooperative with him in this obviously desirable effort.” (Schneiders; Maltese, 1994, p. 168)

Indeed, Carter *was* often dismayed by the way Washington D.C. operated, and many of his aides felt that the entire administration “was treated particularly harshly because of what [Jody] Powell called ‘the residue of cynicism’ left over from the events of Vietnam and Watergate” (Maltese, 1994; Powell, 1984, p. 111). This residue, if you will, would spawn three particular macro issues—the dawn of hypermodernity (evolving from the culture of narcissism), an anti-intellectual bias against his rhetoric, and a no-win presidency. Each of these dilemmas has only evolved more, and now all three situations pose increasingly problematic implications for American presidents and, by extent, the government and the public.

Given that each issue was born primarily from the Vietnam and Watergate eras, there was no set of practices in place accessible for Carter use in combating them. Carter faced each dilemma while in they were in their infancy. Yet, he was pro-active at first, attempting to take precautions that would prevent another Nixon-style presidency.

Whereas Nixon maintained a centralized approach to governing, Carter worked to decentralize the office. Doing so, however, affected the way in which communication flowed from the office to Congress, and from the office to the public. Carter “downplayed the importance of using the Office of Media Liaison—or any other part of the White House—to set a public agenda and get members of the administration to promote that agenda with a unified line” (Maltese, 1994, p. 150). Therefore, the no-win presidency manifested in Carter’s attempt to pass his energy bill legislation, which he intended to be the lynchpin of his administration’s domestic policy.

In one sense, the strategy reflected Carter’s boldness in that he sought comprehensive solutions rather than fight against waves of government bureaucracy. However, by producing the energy package so quickly, the bill was “less coherent than if it had been assembled strategically” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 149). In effect, and as a result, the policy package would lack the appropriate rhetorical balance since its architects would not receive adequate feedback from “the key forces needed to ensure passage of [Carter’s] energy program” (Eizenstat, 2018/Light, 1978, p. 68). Certain rhetorical missteps from both Carter and his staff derailed his initiatives and only strained relations with Congress.

Post- “Crisis” address, Carter’s staff searched for the answers “to try to help salvage a presidency at its low point” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 715). However, the Carter administration faced a laundry list of problems during the final months of his Presidency— “an Iranian revolution, gasoline lines, energy legislation stuck as special interests battled on all sides, and sinking polls” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 715). Yet, it was “an upheaval thousands of miles away in Tehran [that] cruelly prevented the president from .

. . [reconnecting] with the American people to gain a second term in office” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 715). Additionally, the media helped spin a narrative of indecisiveness and weakness that was picked up by other politicians and the public.

These criticisms would follow Carter throughout his no-win presidency. For instance, politicians thought him soft on communism for recognizing “Red” China, and Ronald Reagan attacked the Panama Canal Treaty consistently, even making it a focal point of his presidential candidacy (Balmer, 2014/Carter, 2010). Despite these and other criticisms, however, Carter inevitably embodied Niebuhr’s philosophy that “a public culture does not come ready-made, but . . . ‘must continually be formed and reformed’ through conversation . . . that speaks to the wide ambit of national life” (Halliwell, 2005, p. 8; Bender, 1993, pp. 144-145). Despite this, Carter’s attempts at conversation was often thwarted by a pressure to constantly adhere to the changing rules of the mass audience, whereby the accepted norm was a preference for more “vacuous rhetoric and imagery that has impoverished our public deliberative sphere” (Lim, 2008, p. 4). The increasing anxieties and needs of the American people, which became embodied in its need for comforting language, moved the culture of narcissism towards a culture embedded within hypermodernity.

This led to the election of 1980, whereby Ronald Reagan hijacked Carter’s good intentions and persuaded the nation with the alternate tone of his upbeat and motivational rhetoric that America was a nation of pure goodness, that it’s strength would win out, and that all would be fine (Carter, 1989). While Reagan has been considered a master of the no-win presidency, Carter, meanwhile, maintained an interesting perspective on the nation’s fortieth president: “I think if something has a connotation of disappointment or

failure or unpopularity, he has very adroitly stayed personally aloof from that particular news item. But if something is popular, he's associated himself with it" (Carter, 1989; Maltese, 1994, p. 169). This provides a stark contrast between Carter and Reagan, in that Carter tackled problems head-on in spite of the political consequences or shots to his reputation. While Reagan played the political PR game much better than Carter, Carter may have exhibited a higher level of integrity as a leader overall.

Meanwhile, anti-intellectualism prevails today, and it would seem that only a rhetorical president can alter the path of anti-intellectualism. Additionally, only a non-amateur politician who sets priorities and works within the structure of the D.C. political system can defeat the no-win presidency (Lim, 2008; Light, 1999). Yet, what remains interesting and worthy of continued study is how a president with as much integrity and personal morality as Jimmy Carter can fall so hard merely because he was an outsider. Even a bemused Carter confessed years after his term ended, "I never was able to orchestrate any news, and had a very unsuccessful relationship with the press" (Carter, 1989; Maltese, 1994). Clearly, even the former president is left without answers. Therefore, where can communication educators and scholars go from here, given the state of our political and presidential rhetoric and ethics education in high-schools and colleges? This will be a subject in the final chapter. It is necessary that these challenges be faced, in the same manner that President Carter attempted more than forty years ago. As educators, we must do the hard job of teaching our students the significance of presidential and political rhetoric, speechmaking, and history, despite resistance to such humanities-based education. By finding ways to thread the three areas together, we can, possibly, bridge a widening gap in students' civic knowledge and understanding. To

reverse the trend of anti-intellectual leadership, we must cultivate future leaders who align more with the ethics of a President Carter than the ethics of, say, a Richard Nixon. The ways in which we can achieve this will be discussed next.

Using the “Crisis of Confidence” speech as a springboard, the following chapter will address the current crisis in higher education, and the importance of public speaking, history, and civics education will be presented as means to increasing student engagement in politics. Hannah Arendt’s scholarship on political education will feature in the chapter, as will the concept of the public and private, and the role of the educator in the political theatre.

Chapter 5: The “Crisis of Confidence” Speech in the Educational Theatre of Politics

Introduction

At the outset of this dissertation, two questions were posed as an entryway into an examination of President Jimmy Carter’s “Crisis of Confidence” address to the nation: 1) Was Carter right about America all along when he referred to it as “the most wasteful nation on earth” (source), and 2) If he *was* right, why did the nation fail to listen? The first chapter provided background information about the “Crisis” speech. Specifically, the events that led to the speech—Carter’s election and presidency and the Energy Crisis of 1979—were presented, as was the overall mindset of the nation. Carter’s ethos behind the speech was also detailed. This connected to a discussion of the speech’s relevance to communication ethics. In chapter two, the scholarly figures who largely inspired Carter’s political career and his “Crisis” speech were presented. Chapter three attempted to appropriately contextualize the speech by way of an examination of genre criticism. Lastly, the previous chapter discussed implications of the speech, particularly pertaining to today’s historical moment.

This fifth and final chapter will present another crisis to which the themes in Carter’s “Crisis” speech can be used in response: a crisis in humanities education. The primary argument is that a dearth of speech, history, and civics curriculum exists within the academy’s educational system and threatens the present and future of our nation’s political engagement. Using Hannah Arendt’s work on political education and the relationship between public and private, this problem will be addressed. A second argument to make is that communication educators can alleviate this crisis by reaching

into the ancient traditions of the theatre to find tools that, by their design, increases student awareness of and interest in political participation.

The chapter will begin by, first, turning to the work of Eric B. Gorham (2000), who's study of Hannah Arendt's scholarship and its connection to theatre and politics will provide ground for how professors might use elements of theatre to promote political education in the classroom. Next, undergirding the themes of the chapter will be Hannah Arendt's scholarship on political education, the concept of the public and private, and the role of the educator in the political theatre. Lastly, the chapter (and the dissertation) will conclude by bringing Jimmy Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" speech to the conversation. The specific point in doing so is to show how this particular historical speech, and the president who delivered the speech, can serve as a prime example of art imitating political life. By linking the speech to the crisis of humanities education in the academy, specifically regarding speech, history, and civics education, we can form a new covenant between our future students and our political institutions, thus keeping alive the vision of Jimmy Carter's presidency.

The Current Educational Crisis: The Void of Social Media and Leadership

Christopher Lasch (1979) references Thomas Jefferson's doctrine that the "earth belongs to the living," noting further that American politicians throughout the country's history have subverted the sentiment, more or less envisioning a national destiny that lay solely within their own hands (Lasch, 1979, p. 8). Such leaders who abide by the philosophy of an individually crafted destiny "see little difference between their identity and the [nation's] identity" (Galvin, Lange, and Ashforth, 2015, p. 163). This narrow mindset propelled the agendas of presidents and politicians throughout the mid to late

twentieth century, up to the time of Jimmy Carter's tenure in office. Carter acted differently. He was "the first New Democrat in high office seeking to prune government programs [and] reduce federal regulations," while maintaining "an affinity and concern for the poor and a deep commitment to equal rights for minorities and women" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 171). Carter, driven by his life as a Georgian farmer, whereby he had learned the value of hard work in the fields, felt a responsibility to the ordinary citizen (Eizenstat, 2018). Ironically, it was ordinary citizens, already under the spell of individualism and narcissism, who voted him out of office.

Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* revealed the mindset of the late-twentieth century's therapeutic culture, thereby hinting at the potential for narcissism to steadily creep into our American political institutions. Social self-worshiping has ultimately formed a society that subconsciously endorses narcissistic leaders (Catt, 1986). It spreads from the individual, to the greater public, and finally to our political leadership where, ultimately, it ruptures the political process. There is evidence of such a rupture in the election and subsequent presidency of Donald Trump, and it begs the question to what extent society shapes the leader and the leader shapes society. In examining the historical moment of the 1960s and 70s, we can argue that both society and its leaders influenced one another, given each's predilection for narcissistic behaviors. Presidents Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson are categorized as narcissists by scholar Michael Maccoby (1976, 1981, 2007), while Harold Barrett (1986) claims that, "The life of Senator Joseph McCarthy illustrates the results of narcissist self-interest and grandiosity" (p. 259). It is interesting to note that two of these three examples are of leaders (Johnson and McCarthy) who battled through, arguably, self-made crisis in their historical moment.

Other American political leaders have done the same—all of whom exhibited varying degrees of narcissism. President Carter had also been criticized (most notably by Reagan) for blaming the nation for his own failures. However, as discussed throughout this dissertation, Carter was certainly not the overall cause of the crises he faced, nor did he exemplify the kind of narcissism discussed here.

For scholars like Isaac Catt (1986), “To ignore narcissism is to ignore one of the most significant problems of our time” (p. 242). He adds that various social and historical forces “have combined to create a nation of self-worshippers” (p. 243). By eliminating boundaries between the private and the public, often occurring today through our evolving social media, we see a rise in narcissistic personal relationships as we “try to impose ourselves on others” (Gorham, 2000, p. 11). Such imposition leads to a decrease in sociability, since people eventually grow weary of maintaining online relationships with people “who constantly and unremittingly reveal themselves to others” (Gorham, 2000, p. 11). How humans use online media and are used by it is worthy of discussion, particularly as it pertains to our emotional and psychological well-being and its effect on our political lives. Social media is a twenty-first century embodiment of the breakdown between the public and private that perpetuates the educational crisis.

Facebook, in particular, provides an intriguing example of an online media for which we assume the roles of both user and used. Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has evolved into a nearly all-encompassing communicative channel for its users. It effectively exists as “a social space, a communications service, a creative outlet, a place of work, a media outlet, [and] a passport for the rest of the internet” (Hermann, 2018, p. 1). In other words, “Facebook has brought village life to the masses” (Binns, 2014, p. 84). It enables

humans to “connect” with one another digitally through messaging, photos, posting, and other means, and has even provided careers for many people in the technology field. These jobs blend work with pleasure, as employees are paid for doing what they love (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). However, Facebook has also become quite controversial over the past decade, partly due to its acquisition of subscriber information and its increasingly addictive nature.

Brailovskaia, et al. (2018) references Andreassen’s work on Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD) and refers to it as a “subtype of behavior addiction that includes six significant characteristics, i.e., salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal symptoms, and conflict” (p. 1). The personality traits involved with the disorder include: extraversion, neuroticism, and narcissism (Brailovskaia, et al., 2018). In other words, Facebook’s subscribers enjoy the social media experience to such an extent that they continue to use it even at great cost (Brailovskaia, et al., 2018), as they become exceedingly focused on themselves. In the process, they fulfill the design function of the site by sharing great amounts of personal information with others (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011). The information shared could either increase people’s awareness of their limitations, or it could lead to a positive bias, which might raise self-esteem by allowing for the construction of a dream-like world.

Facebook allows users to indulge in dreams. Specifically, what Harrell and Chong-U (2017) label the “Avatar Dream.” This is a “culturally shared vision of a future in which, through the computer, people can become whomever or whatever we want to be” (p. 50). The authors indicate further that the Avatar Dream has two distinct elements: 1) the technical element, which allows users to control a “virtual surrogate for themselves

in a virtual world” and 2) the experimental element, which permits users to engage in any number of experiences beyond the ones encountered in the physical world (2017, p. 52). A manifestation of the Avatar Dream is the Facebook social media profile (Harrell and Chong-U, 2017). Through our Facebook profiles, we find other potential “friends” to add to our network. In turn, people within the Facebook universe find us and form their impressions of us. Granted, we can tailor our profiles as we wish, allow people to see what we want them to, and restrict what we do not. Yet, the game of Facebook is accruing social capital, and the way to do so is by creating a profile that will represent the user well within that virtual community.

As our technology has advanced, the use of Facebook as a digital means of self-representation has grown even more pervasive; it is now a primary means by which we express ourselves (Harrell and Chong-U, 2017). Yet, expression has a flipside, as “increased time on Facebook may not only be associated with depression but also may make individuals feel badly about themselves when compared to others.” (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014). To alleviate this feeling, subscribers can take on aspects of a different or alternate identity, or can even digitally enhance their natural identity and live vicariously through their existence on Facebook while distancing themselves communicatively from the physical world and plunging feet first into the hyper-world.

Inevitably, our focus drifts from our roles within our non-digital communities to the appearance of ourselves as individuals, for it is no longer good enough to be recognized by the good that we do in society; now it is only good enough to be recognized by what we appear to be (Lipovetsky, 2005). As Binns (2014) posits, we have “now reached a point where mass use of social networks . . . has made us hyper-

connected in a way that has become stifling” (p. 83). We desire to stand out, to stand apart from everyone else and from our communities. Yet, we also indulge our need to be part of the group. Facebook, provides us with both: 1) a faux community to which we belong, and 2) a sense of life revolving around us. In the end, we have digital connectedness, but not true connectedness of the mind and soul. In short, we are left wallowing within the hyperreal.

Umberto Eco (2002) describes Hyperreality in the following manner: that we, as Americans are “In search of instances where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake” (p. 8). What counts in this case, is not whether something is authentic. Rather, what counts is the information that is conveyed (Eco, 2002). Facebook certainly conveys a great deal of our personal information, and it also takes it. When interacting online with our relatives or friends, we are feeding data into a metaphorical machine (Hermann, 2018). This image of our data being consumed by the tentacles of cyberspace and emerging in the hands of the powerful corporate machine calls to mind the science fiction film, *The Matrix*, adding an eerie touch of science fiction to the real-life Facebook narrative. Yet, as it is, machines and technology may already be assuming a certain dominance over our lives.

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre (1980) writes about the effect that therapy has on society, namely that the therapist often obliterates the distinction between the understanding of manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. A key term for MacIntyre is *emotivism*, which he describes as “the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling” (p. 12). How does this connect to Facebook

usage? Returning to Sherri Turkle (2011) we find that, “Facebook . . . leaves members to make up their own rules” (p. 181). These rules are not necessarily understood by those we contact. Therefore, a great deal of apologizing occurs when we alienate others due to our own rules of engagement. However, apologies are more like confessions, since an apology deals directly with the person who is wronged (Turkle, 2011). A confession to a website, on the other hand, creates a situation whereby “something that is less than conversation begins to seem like conversation” (Turkle, 2011, p. 231). At least, it does to the person doing the confessing.

In 2012, Facebook registered more than one billion active participants, and the site only continues to grow (Soukup, 2018). It is one of a number of online platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and others) whereby we document our friendships, communicate with “friends” or “followers” and, ultimately, accrue cultural and social capital (Good, 2013). As of 2019, people all over the world, particularly those of younger demographics, consider social media the primary means by which to express oneself and, arguably, the most popular form of social media today is Facebook (Vargas, 2019). For Arendt, social media would, most likely, embody the “social” realm, which challenges both the private and the public spheres. The social realm emerges and perpetuates an idea that life itself is our highest good, “and which values conformity at the expense of human plurality” (Lilja, 2018; Levinson, 2010, p. 476). Yet, the effects that social media has on our mental health, as a result, can remain hidden to us, thereby causing a breakdown in our political engagement.

Just in the past five years alone, many scholars have endeavored to ascertain Facebook’s effects on users’ mental states. Kaufman, et al. (2017) postulated that a

decrease in mental health quality correlates with an increase in the use of Facebook. In a study by Weijjs, et al. (2017), it was discovered that “those with a greater need to be accepted by a broader, larger group (i.e. need for popularity) shared more personal information” with others (p. 13). These and other similar examples beg the question whether, by succumbing to our need for acceptance, we rely more heavily upon digital manifestations of social communities for affirmation and a sense of belonging. This points to what Arendt referred to as bad faith, whereby people live under a delusion that performing certain activities (in this case becoming part of the Facebook/social media community) will garner acceptance (Arnett, 2013). This feeling derived from The Enlightenment’s notion of “intellectual hope,” which gave people a desire for social assimilation and acceptance (Arnett, 2013, p. 20). However, Arendt warns against this false optimism that “invokes the narcissism of self-protection in the privileged” and trust in the person committed to the ideals of the Enlightenment (Arnett, 2013, p. 20). Self-protection results from the anxiousness to which Lasch (1979) discussed throughout his works, and upon which Carter partly based his “Crisis” address, arguing that it had an effect on our mental state that, ultimately, led to a loss in national confidence.

Granted, much of the current literature is “replete with contradictory findings” in regards to our internet use and our mental health (Miller, 2018). The potential for studying multiple narratives revealed by social media practices should, therefore, prompt communication scholars engaging in qualitative work to study the findings of quantitative research and interpret critically how Facebook and other social media influence our behavioral patterns. Mazalin and Moore (2004) have suggested that our online “friends” (the imaginary) reduce the quality of our tangible friendships (the real), thus confusing

our sense of reality and lessening our chances of experiencing genuine relationships. This isolation leaves us in a fragile state of loneliness, which seems antithetical, given social media's ability to shorten communicative distances, allowing individuals to come together (Miller, 2018). However, while use of the Internet, social media in particular, helps us to "establish bonds even when physically separated," negative outcomes may be the result when we engage with the Internet and social media more often than we do those people in our closest relationships (Miller, 2018, p. 61). Facebook, in this regard, poses a tricky dilemma, especially given how it has become embedded within our society. Arendt offers us a possible solution. Rather than taking on the role of the parvenu, which hopes to find acceptance in a group that offers cheap, interpersonal grace, we might, rather, be willing to assume the role of pariah and work outside of the system to perform the important deeds that shape character (Arnett, 2013). Thereby, we might engage in a "communicative act of refusal [which] begins when one no longer plays the game" of social inclusion and exclusion (Arnett, 2013, p. 27). We can, thus, engage in more objective and intellectual methods of political engagement, rather than those predicated on individualism and narcissism. By not privatizing ourselves, we fall prey to uncivil interpersonal relationships in our public lives, thus, we either consciously or subconsciously participate in "authoritarian political action" (Gorham, 2000, p. 11). We must be mindful of this possibility so that we might, in this case, restore the important boundaries between the public and private essential to our political action.

Otherwise, if we continue to allow social media to control us, then the many social self-worshippers will subconsciously continue to endorse narcissistic leaders, thereby only furthering the question to what extent society shapes the leader and vice

versa. The definition of the word narcissism and/or narcissist originated from the ancient Greek tale of Narcissus—a man who fell in love with his own image appearing to him in a pool of water (Wilhelm, Wilhelm, and Wilhelm, 2013). In the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud (1962) applied the concept of narcissism to psychoanalysis and published the first full treatment on the condition in 1914 (Barrett, 1986). Higgs (2009) refers to Freud’s analysis, indicating that narcissism manifests itself in three ways: “self-admiration, self-aggrandizement, and a tendency to see others as an extreme of the self” (p. 170). There are certainly those within American politics who epitomize these three manifestations, ultimately engaging in leadership from a “mirror, mirror on the wall” perspective (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937). These leaders emerge from the economic and social systems which shape American society; they also emerge as a result of the public’s growing fears and anxieties pertaining to the inequities of those systems.

If an Aristotelian approach to political leadership is taken, truth is the virtue through which ideal leadership is primarily manifested. In his essay, “Truth and Political Leadership,” Theodore R. Weber (1989) writes, “A consideration of the experience of political leaders, of what they actually encounter in practice, reinforces the claim that political leadership must deal inescapably with considerations of truth” (p. 5). When referring to the United States’ political system, Weber (1989) insists that our political processes and decision-making ideals that are by now imbedded traditions, are based largely on trust. Trust depends on truthfulness. Without truthfulness, we lose our sense of trust and, therefore, “lose the ability to distinguish genuine problems from manufactured problems” (Arnett and Arneson, 1999, p. 16). According to Barrett (1986), leaders who are narcissistic assume defensive postures to counteract perceived weaknesses and

inadequacy. Defensiveness assumes the place of effectiveness, thereby, removing trust from the equation, with trust being the resource needed to relate with success (1986). Further, Barrett argues, “Trust is generated from appropriate openness to others and willingness to take sensibly indicated rhetorical risks. Defensiveness leads to the opposite end, building barriers and estranging those who would interact” (p. 264). Thus, the speculation is that the destructive narcissist only trusts himself and, therefore, leads according to his own manufactured truths, while conversely the productive narcissist leads reflexively, operating from a myriad of truths and perspectives. This approach ultimately fosters an atmosphere of trust among the polity. Therefore, to complete the metaphor, truth would be the Aristotelian fulcrum of the adequately balanced leader.

A logical question to ask, therefore, is how a destructive narcissist comes to lead a country, as opposed to a productive narcissist who embodies trust and truth? Once again, we turn to Weber (1989) who offers an alternate metaphor for use as a possible answer. He references the Christian bible, specifically the prophet Isaiah, and suggests that the answer to this question emerges from the behavior of the public itself. The selected verses indicate a radical, anomic society who “have no warmth of human feeling, no reciprocity of acceptance, no selfhood not reduced to pure ego. They quarrel, snarl, complain, fight, rebel” (Weber, 1989, p. 7). They have become a society of individuals in which lying is common communicative practice (1989). So, what is the point of Weber’s religious metaphor? It is that expectations of truthfulness are essential to any political society governed by consent of the people rather than by authoritarianism (1989). Yet, based on the metaphor, truthfulness is lacking in a society (even a democratic one) that places individuality before commonality, and removes the barriers between public and

private. All of this leads to tyranny, “which attempts to substitute violence for power, destroys civil society and the public realm by eliminating spaces where people can both come together and hold each other at a distance” (Gorham, 2000, p. 34). This environment promotes the political narcissist, especially when sects of the population are thrust into rapidly changing situations.

In an interview with Dearlove (2003), Kets de Vries explains how change causes anxiety in people and leads to a perceived need for strong leadership. He states, “Anxious people look for someone to calm them down. So, we are always looking for leaders who can do that. And the media usually does everything it can to reinforce this image of strong leaders who can act as saviors” (p. 26). It is, therefore, quite conceivable that the narcissistic leader is elevated to power by the same anxious public who may (or may not) eventually resist him. Dearlove extrapolates on this, suggesting, “Heroes often end up becoming villains. Nobody can live up to those expectations, this myth creation. So eventually all these leaders are a disappointment . . . The media creates them and then kills them (2003, p. 28). It is, therefore, the media (and thus the public acting through the media) who often facilitates organizational change, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. Public leaders are often raised onto pedestals only to be destroyed by social units, all of which are guided by the moral codes of various media outlets and their numerous political agendas. We saw this with the Carter presidency, as a media that paved the way for his election, ultimately helped enable his downfall, and the public followed suit.

In his essay *Anxiety and Politics*, Franz Neumann (1957) offers some further insight into the evolution of this phenomenon. He argues that authoritarian (or narcissistic) politics rises from a combination of economic, political, and psychological

forces. These various forces can lead to situations of societal anxiety that result in pockets of the populace identifying with a specific leader to whom they hope will alleviate their stress. He lists five influential factors involved in this identification: 1) the alienation of labor, 2) destructive competition, 3) social alienation, 4) political alienation, and 5) the institutionalization of anxiety. Fuchs (2017) expands upon Neumann's theory and draws a correlation to the 2016 presidential election as well as the decision of the UK to leave the European Union. He writes, "The combination of these five factors has in countries such as the UK and the USA resulted in an increase of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments and in the election of Donald Trump and the UK's decision to leave the EU" (p. 9). To put this another way, the repressed group begins to feel helpless and humiliated and, therefore, psychologize their borders and grow preoccupied with their protection (Volkan and Fowler, 2009). This situation has often occurred in the aftermath of crises within the capitalist system. The public is often adversely affected by such destructive narcissism, though the awareness of such destructive behavior may not exist, since such leaders often plays to the anxieties of the people, insistent that they will fix all of peoples' problems. Therefore, we must seek out ways to combat destructive narcissism in our political institutions.

By contrast, a quintessential example of virtuous leadership in American history is Abraham Lincoln. However, as Wilson (2000) states, "Presidential leadership, even Lincoln's, is never a single thing that benefits everyone equally" (p. 16). With this assertion in mind, Wilson suggests three principles that highlight the "dynamism of presidential leadership" (2000, p.16):

- Leadership for one United States community is not necessarily leadership for all communities.
- Leadership for one United States community is not leadership in the same way for other communities.
- The public plays an active role in the constitution of presidential leadership.

The last principle is tricky, however, since within the public there exists many differing narratives and, as a result, ideologies can clash.

To aid us in recognition of the negative leaders, McCall and Lombardo (1983) identify traits of leadership failure as skill deficiencies, burn out, insensitivity, coldness and aloofness, arrogance, betraying trust, and being overly ambitious. These deficiencies can eventually lead to the following leader-inflicted outcomes: abuse of power, damage to others, over-exercise of control to satisfy personal needs, and rule breaking to serve one's own purposes (Higgs, 2009). One only has to examine the presidential rhetoric of President Trump to see evidence of this. During his 2016 presidential campaign, he offered the following messages: "Our roads and bridges are falling apart; our airports are in Third World condition. . . America is far less safe—and the world is far less stable. . . [There is] poverty and violence at home, war and destruction abroad" (Trump, 2016). Trump epitomizes the anti-intellectual presidency though his ability to effectively reject intellectual language and claim his own rhetoric as common sense (Lim, 2008). Aiding Trump is an increasingly technologized and entwining media that increases its reach into all of our lives. Even when receiving negative publicity, Trump receives publicity nonetheless, and seems to even revel in it. This dependence on the media, as well as the brashness of his rhetoric paint him, in many ways, as the anti-Carter.

Therefore, it matters not to which political party or ideology one belongs. Together, we must, both individually and as a nation, examine the ground upon which our political leadership is built as well as our part in cultivating that ground. Both our differences *and* similarities should be utilized to unify us and not divide us in this process. Leadership should reflect the desires of the people and should be a conduit for truth and trust between leaders and the public. It is time for the American public to cease allowing leaders with negative leadership qualities to shape the nations' society and, instead, shape our future leaders so that they may fulfill their duties to the country and, subsequently, the world. To do that, however, we must also turn the mirror upon ourselves and be willing to acknowledge our part in the emergence of negative narcissistic leaders who attempt to shape the nation in their own image.

This discussion of social media, our fragile mental states, and how they permit narcissistic leaders to emerge connects to chapter 2. The chapter attempted to draw a connection between Carter's address and the entire Energy Crisis of the 1970s and communication ethics. Carter (1979) asserted that the nation had become increasingly fragmented and motivated by individual self-interest, and that this path would only compromise the very fabric of freedom which bound the nation together. Instead of a unified *United States*, each individual, by pursuing his or her own ends, would come to know a "mistaken idea of freedom," (Carter, 1979) in which people rely on emotivism and live according to their own interpretation of virtue. Yet, as Locke (1689) would famously write, "Where there is no law, there is no freedom" (p. 234). Therefore, it remains up to communication and humanities educators to remind students that freedom involves a paradoxical practice of bonding themselves to others, all of whom are engaged

in the same life struggles, and that removing themselves from that bond comes at a great cost to education, the law and to freedom (Maier, 2016; Arendt, 1958/1998; Benhabib, 1992). We must be mindful of these practices, and can do so by altering our educational priorities and our educational practices. In the next section, we will examine how utilizing the concepts of the theatre can aid instructors in creating a more participatory environment for speech, history, and civics instruction.

Challenges in Critical Instruction: Moving Students Away from Tasks and Toward A Theatre of Politics

In the twenty-first century, college and university students are exceedingly reliant upon rubrics, processes, and, what is referred to here as, “checklist learning.” Rather than engaging their intellect, intuition, imagination, and critical thinking skills, they prefer itemized instructions for completing assignments. Our colleges and universities only cater to this need. Invoking Arendt’s philosophy on the matter, Maier (2016) argues that our American educational institutions today “pursue the wrong objectives” by encouraging students to pursue jobs that encourage the kind of “marketable competencies” that merely perpetuate the status quo (p. 291; p. 292). This only leads to normalization in our colleges and universities, whereby the seemingly highest academic pursuits are newness and progress. This is symbolized by campuses’ “shiny new facilities, state-of-the-art classrooms, large enrollments, plentiful endowments, and solid placement rates” (Maier, 2016, p. 292). Yet, the achievement of these goals, and the impression it leaves upon students is that they must only fulfill their own happiness, in which happiness becomes manifested in personal job success (Maier, 2016). Therefore, in the race to position themselves for entry to the corporate world, students eschew

challenges that encourage critical thought, interpretation, and philosophical consideration in lieu of a task checklist which they maintain from the outset of their college careers through graduation. While often required by universities, humanities courses grounded in more rhetorical work are, thereby, easily dismissed by students as non-essential to job pursuits. To put it simply, they are not on the checklist.

Therefore, humanities professors are tasked with encouraging students to rely on their intelligence rather than the process, and concern themselves more with learning rather than just receiving points, and, thus, letter grades. Taking a cue from Hannah Arendt's work on education, professors must strive to communicate ideas to students by teaching "political judgement (and by extension social and economic judgement) to their undergraduates" (Gorham, 2000, p. 94). In turn, undergraduates must observe politics and apply the ideas learned in the classroom so they can practice sound civic judgement, which remains a prerequisite for political action (Gorham, 2000).

To be clear, this is not to suggest that rubrics, methods and, ultimately, grades should be dismissed. Rather, the suggestion here is that we, as educators, readily placate students who are already too reliant upon processes through their increasing reliance upon technology in and outside of the classroom. As a result, students rely too heavily on the predictability and efficiency that technologies and processes provide. Thus, they "retreat into these technologies and methodologies to insulate themselves from the responsibility of making difficult choices" (Maier, 2016, p. 297). Arguably, unless students are comfortable knowing precisely how an assignment is *supposed* to be completed, unless they are provided with a specific breakdown of how points will be distributed, and unless they have access to study guides, templates, and other "instruction

manual” kinds of assignment aids, they have difficulty accessing their own creativity and assertiveness either for fear of doing the assignment wrong, or out of disinterest in learning the reasons *why* they are tasked with a given assignment. To put it bluntly, they just want to know what to do so that they can get the points and, thus, the grade.

Professors must, therefore, engage in the creation of political space. Such a space is free, and it creates a learning environment that promotes and nurtures free actions. Action, for Arendt, “provides the vital force through which persons create and renew their public life together” (Maier, 2016, p. 298). By creating a free political space, educators call “something into being which did not exist before” (Gorham, 2000, p. 30; Arendt, 1961, p. 151). In this creation, we are able to pivot from processes and toward creativity, by favoring pure learning over rubrics, and engaging in meaningful work. Students can follow a teacher’s lead in this regard by coming to recognize their professional identity as it emerges from the context of their work (Maier, 2016). This pushes students to accept responsibility for not only the work they choose to undertake, but for their practices throughout the course of doing such work. They, thereby, engage in meaningful work by assuming a role that is connected to a narrative, a “public story that transforms it from the routine deployment of ‘skills’ to a craft that sustains human life” (Maier, 2016, p. 298; Fritz, 2013). Thus, work is no longer a mere checklist. Rather, work becomes a vocation, a calling, a path that students are compelled to follow.

To help students move beyond checklists and rubrics and toward this path, it has been suggested that certain connections between teachers and students are essential. Wiig, Silseth, and Erstad (2018) suggest three pedagogical “link-making forms” that instructors can utilize: “supporting knowledge building, promoting continuity, and

encouraging emotional engagement” (p. 45). For the authors, instructors’ expertise in “building cognitive connections” is considered fundamental (p. 45). They also cite Polman (2006), who argued that instructors “who have disciplinary learning goals cannot simply hope to engage learners by importing the surface features of learners’ existing interests and practices” (p. 45). Therefore, it falls on professors to find ways of unleashing students’ critical and interpretive skills by helping to create meaning. Taking a cue from Christopher Lasch (1979) a ground of historical and rhetorical continuity must be established—the philosophy that learning is achieved through an understanding and a consideration for the past, the present, and the future. To increase this knowledge and establish such a ground, instructors can often make use of examples from their own lives. However, Bolkan and Goodboy (2019) question whether the best examples in the classroom come from instructors or from students themselves. Perhaps both students *and* instructors can provide sufficient examples for completing tasks, but more attention might be given to students’ examples. Yet, it should be emphasized, that an effort to achieve collaboration in the classroom can lead to educational dangers, since there is no gauge for how their examples and ideas will be received in the public realm (Schutz and Sandy, 2015). Turning to Arendt again, we must guard against college and university classrooms from becoming “socializing institutions rather than educational ones” (Lilja, 2018, p. 548). A proper sense of authority must be maintained. Professors should be teachers, not friends.

Let us continue with Arendt for a moment, given her insistence that education must remain separate from politics (Lilja, 2018). She believed that the education of youth in political matters robbed them of their “future role as political agents, and indicates,

above all, the inability or unwillingness of adults to take responsibility for the world into which they have brought their children” (Lilja, 2018, p. 538). Scholars have differed with Arendt on this point, with the observation posed here that college and university students are no longer children. They have spent the better part of their lives to that point observing adult behavior and thinking about the functions of social conventions (Gorham, 2000). That being said, the majority of college and university students are not necessarily mature adults either, and educators must find appropriate ways to simulate political situations so students, as they did as children, might observe and consider the behaviors of history and draw conclusions based on them.

Instructors must also be clear in their explanation of course concepts. According to Bolkan (2017), “instructors who have a difficult time explaining class concepts in a simple manner, who cannot create examples to explain course concepts, and who deliver course lessons in a convoluted fashion” engage in disfluency. Bolkan (2016) also argues that when instructors do not make clear their instructions, they “shift learners’ attention from deeply processing information to cognitive processes that do not aid in learning, such as trying to make sense out of a confusing lesson” (p. 153). Wiig, Silseth, and Erstad (2018) also look at the instructor clarity, specifically how opportunities and limitations in creating, what they refer to as “intercontextuality . . . emerge[s] in teacher-student interactions, with a particular focus on the teacher’s role” (p. 44). In this sense, intercontextuality refers to the ways that teachers and students make connections between ideas in the ongoing meaning-making interactions of classroom teaching and learning” (Floriani, 1993; Engle, 2006; Bloome et al., 2009). They also examine how instructors utilize students’ everyday knowledge and experience “as resources for creating

intercontextuality in their learning trajectories” (p. 44). This suggests a give-and-take between teachers and students, which only makes sense from the standpoint that teachers also require continued education in order to perform their jobs effectively and evolve as instructors themselves.

This plays out in our approach to teaching in general. According to Herrmann (2014), “It may be possible to encourage deep approaches to learning by altering the learning environment” (p. 591). In other words, instructors’ reliance upon lectures creates an environment whereby students become “passive spectators,” rather than active participants (Hermann, 2014, p. 592). Hermann adds that a deep approach to learning is necessary so that students may “critically examine evidence, relate ideas, and look for overall structure and meaning” (p. 592). Therefore, it is possible that instructors and departments should increasingly turn to alternate forms of classroom configurations.

Garner and Chan (2019) refer to the work of Hall & Dufree (2016); Flipped Learning Network (2014), and Sherrow et al. (2016) to define the key components of a flipped classroom:

- Improved student engagement.
- Collaboration and team learning.
- A move from a group learning space to a more individualized one.
- Emphasis on instructor as designer, facilitator, and coach rather than expert.
- Emphasis on students taking ownership of learning (self-motivated learning).
- Use of active learning strategies (activities, discussion, feedback) rather than passive lectures.
- Student engagement through pre-class study or quizzes.

However, regarding points three and four, it must be asked whether, by giving students the “power” to create a more individualized space through self-learning, professors actually push students toward a certain kind of scholastic emotivism (MacIntyre, 1980), in which students devise their own course outcomes. A fine line must be drawn between increased student self-reliance and respect for educational tradition. A location in which students learn to build civic relationships “that transcend the particular time that each human being is on the earth” should be developed, the appearance of which could be akin to a worldly theater (Gorham, 2000, p. 29). In this space, students might learn to apply dramatic theory in order to visualize the public realm in which individuals meet and conduct themselves as citizens (Gorham, 2000).

The Classroom as a Political Theatre

Theatre can prove a useful tool in the practice of speech, history, and civics education in colleges and universities. As Gorham (2000) advises us, “Professors can create conditions under which students can learn to enlarge their mentality . . . by approaching their subject matters theatrically in the manner of the ancient Greeks [thereby] creating spaces of appearance” (p. 94). Hannah Arendt also considered theatre as a metaphor for politics, and, as in the theatre, the functioning of our political institutions is predicated upon a certain kind of performance (Gorham, 2000). Political action requires speech. Otherwise, “speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be [a speaker]” (Arendt 1958b, p. 158). Therefore, if cultivating a communication classroom according to the tenets of the theatre, public speaking must be an initial educational seed to be sown.

Speech in the modern political theatre draws its lineage, in part, from the theatre of battle. In twentieth-century America, specifically, during WWI and WWII, speech was considered an essential aspect of serving the country. National patriotism filtered down into the world of entertainment. For instance, the “Four Minute Men” was an organization whose members would deliver three to four-minute speeches about the war prior to the screening of popular Hollywood films (Gehrke, 2009). As was also the case in warfare, there was also conflict in speech, particularly “the practice and training of speech” as a result of the World Wars (Gehrke, 2009, p. 51). Speech teachers promoted such conflict in classroom instruction. In fact, it was Van Wye (1918) who claimed that, “the work of the teacher of speech is eminently essential in the great task of winning the war” (p. 371; Gehrke, 2009, p. 48). Even beyond war, Van Wye claimed that the work of speech teachers contribute to the nation’s aims overall (1918). Teachers picked up the mantle of the military and taught students the art of rhetorical battle. The best public speakers who emerged were “markedly dominant,” and the further conditioning of speech students advocated forcefulness and dominance as essential traits of effective oratory (Gehrke, 2009, p. 51). Granted, this more competitive approach to speechmaking runs counter to Aristotle’s four functions of rhetoric. Simply winning an argument for the sake of winning should not be a primary goal. It is this attitude, cultivated during wartime in America, that may have influenced political speech in today’s historical moment, whereby simply proving oneself to be “right” is a motivating factor in discourse and argument.

While speech education became geared toward patriotic war rhetoric during the first half of the twentieth-century, the first few decades overall saw a substantial change

in how communication was used politically. Gehrke (2009) states, “Speech teachers and scholars took up a movement toward a broader and more inclusive democracy and the subsequent education that would be required for citizens to participate” (p. 33). Further, “Many in the field of speech found justification and guiding principles for their pedagogy and scholarship” (Gehrke, 2009, p. 33). During the latter twentieth-century, the concept of will emerged and became, perhaps, the “single most important principle of the late-twentieth-century communication studies” (Gehrke, 2009, p. 133). Specifically, communication became an encounter of will, with two juxtaposed purposes—sharing and distancing (133). This also points to Arendt’s theories of public and private. While there must be a separation between the two social spheres, they must both coincide. Further, for “men and women to appear in speech and action in order to construct a common world . . . the public sphere must be defined by equality” (Lilja, 2018, p. 540). Along with equality, there must also be equity in how we treat one another. In George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, Professor Henry Higgins reveals his concept of equitable treatment of others in a discussion with his protégé, Eliza Doolittle:

“The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if we were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.” (Shaw, 2010)

In other words, people must treat one another as equals, and there must be an equity of perspective and mutual respect for one another, all the while engaging with one another in a space supported by justice and the law (Topolski, 2015).

Despite the passing of the World Wars and the emergence of good orators who were ethically unsound, public speaking was still believed to be a discipline that fostered good moral character throughout the twentieth-century (Gehrke, 2009, p. 56). This philosophy enables educators to walk speech studies into the marketplace because of its influence on politics in general, with politics in this sense a reference to the broader workings of the body politic. Gehrke (2009) states, “The teachers of speech incorporated these principles of mental health and faith in American democracy into the moral and ethical structures that might be taught in the classrooms and defended in the journals” (p. 57). She further maintains that, “The drive to present standards for ethical speech to students and to adapt their behavior to these normative mental hygiene principles became the defining center of some curricula, overtaking an interest in performance or persuasion” (2009, p. 58). In this, Gehrke makes the astute argument that rhetorical studies, particularly, speech, serves a greater purpose than mere persuasion.

In addition to speech, history and attentiveness to historical moments is another essential aspect of political education. Historical moments emerge out of the questions which require our attention, and “how we answer those questions shape our lives and offer us identity” (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell McManus, 2017, p. 11). As Arendt tells us, “education is about acquainting children with the world into which they have been born as newcomers” (Lilja, 2018, p. 547). Since memory lags, and it takes us time for us to be fully cognizant of our own existence, there is a history that we are not aware of, and a history that influences *that* history, stretching back through the years. Arendt observed that society, during her time, lived within a vacuous moment, in which our traditions no longer united the past and the future (Arnett, 2013). For her, the space between past and

future was tradition and, without it, we must be even more attentive to historical moments in order to derive meaning for our lives (Arnett, 2013). Tradition remains, even today, the enemy of modernity. Moving away from tradition shifts us toward an “aftermath of confusion,” and away from the sense of a grounded good (Arnett, 2013, p. 49).

Communication education in speech and civics must also be grounded in history and historical moments, since they serve as the “raw materials from which thinkers of the future may address moments of their own age” (Arnett, Fritz, & Bell McManus, 2017, p. 11). Of course, in order to know one’s own historical moment, students must know the historical pathway led to that moment. Therefore, a knowledge of historical lineage is significant to this understanding.

Speech and History, inevitably, bring us to Civics. According to Gorham (2000), “The theatre of the university is built upon three pillars—research, teaching, and service” (p. 109). By way of these three pillars, the university influences students to engage in scholarly spectatorship, which is “essential in charging actions with meaning and in recognizing actions as essentially political” (Gorham, 2000, p. 109). By being political spectators who engage in research, teaching, and service, students, theoretically, become interested in civic action (Gorham, 2000). Goffman (1959) argues that people in the public realm attempt to control the impressions that others have of them, comparing this to acting. He suggests that actors present fronts and offer idealized impressions of themselves (Gorham, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, Goffman believes that human behavior is about asserting, or attempting to assert, one’s control over others, and that “theatrical expression becomes a means by which one can accomplish this end” (Gorham, 2000, p. 5). It is easy to see the connection, in this case, between performance on stage and

performance in the political realm, whereby people of opposing ideologies play a rhetorical game of tug-of-war with one another over what should be the correct course of action.

An alternate perspective must be presented here, however. In the study of acting, it is often posited that an actor's primary function is to reveal truth, not to mask it. In accordance with Stella Adler (Stella Adler Quotes), "Acting is reacting." It is about submission and vulnerability. It is also about faith. Actors do not attempt to control; they engage in reaction. In comparing politics to acting, we find that both can be used to achieve a desired outcome. Additionally, both need an audience, but actors should not craft characters based on what the audience might want to see. Actors craft characters based on the truth of *who* the character is. Therefore, as educators, we need to instill a dose of pure acting into our political theatre by focusing on who various political actors throughout history were. For instance, to arrive at an understanding of Abraham Lincoln, we must strive to discover who he was from a multitude of objective perspectives. In doing so, we can achieve a synthesis of theatrical and political. We can learn who Lincoln was in both a theatrical and political sense.

This is not to say that certain paradoxes between performance and politics do not exist. Quite the contrary, for while "dramatic action serves as a conduit to power and helps communicate a powerful message to an audience," political action often "conceals as much as it reveals" (Gorham, 2000, p. 6). Further, while an actor's task is to reveal the true nature of a character, "We do not always present our authentic selves [to the public], but rather the selves we deem acceptable or safe or comfortable for public consumption" (Gorham, 2000, p. 6). Therefore, as with the study of political actors, it is also necessary

to study the entirety of political situations from objective perspectives as well.

Comparing this to the theatre, we would say to study the entire play from a dramaturgical perspective. Only “by having the whole of [the play] in front of us, finished, that we not only make judgements about the play, but that we understand the significance of every scene, and thus every action” (Gorham, 2000, p. 7). Away from the confines of the stage, this only happens through history—once “the play” has been written. Therefore, as stated previously, educators must be mindful to accentuate the significance of history and historical moments in order to provide proper context for students.

Of course, in addition to determining what will be taught, professors must also determine *how* their subject matter can be taught so that students actually pay attention. Otherwise, it is all for naught. (Gorham, 2000). Yet, “this is where politics as theatre can make its mark, because viewed in this way politics can become something visually and aurally stirring to students” (Gorham, 2000, p. 98). By emphasizing all aspects of political education (speech, history, civics), and by utilizing the theatre as a metaphor for political life and political action, it is possible that we might reverse the crisis of education in our twenty-first century moment. For Arendt, the crisis in education began with an overall “decline in standards and levels of achievement” during the 1960s, including a decline in teacher authority (Arnett, 2013, p. 56). For the educational community to thrive, teachers must reassert their authority in the classroom through good character and ethical practice, not merely by way of title. If we rely too heavily on the title of “professor,” “instructor,” or what have you, we promote “aristocracies, meritocracies, and oligarchies,” and affirm the idea that achieving a certain kind of status

alone is sufficient for holding leadership positions (Arnett, 2013, p. 56). Instead, we teachers must move beyond career designations and toward vocational practices.

For Arendt, doing so resides not in teaching or even content, but in the willingness to model responsibility for the world before us, and imparting a sense of the “why” for learning that will prevent students from functioning as consumers but as learners responsible for the world (Arnett, 2013). Doing so places tradition once again at the center of the educational process. For Arendt, tradition in education is possible through the pursuit of natality, which Maier (2016) defines for us as “the capacity for resilient struggle that enables persons and institutions to lean from their mistakes and begin again” (p. 293). However, tradition must neither be considered completely ridged nor unbending. Nor must it be considered perfect. The weaknesses of our traditions must also be taught, since weakness and failure reveal why we must continue to work on making them better, or possibly move on from them (Maier, 2016). The “why” becomes an important tool for teachers, a key ingredient for pedagogical success.

It is through the explanation of the “why” whereby we, as teachers, may move past mere teaching and assume the role of lamp holders, in which we can illuminate the path toward both knowledge and understanding for our students (Arnett, 2013). Also, in this way, we engage in mentorship, in much the same way that film heroes such as Obi-Wan Kenobi from *Star Wars*, or Mr. Myagi from *The Karate Kid*, engage with Luke Skywalker and Daniel LaRusso. By extension, we might consider educators to have the propensity for embodying Joseph Campbell’s monomyth (1972) and its various stages of narrative. The first stage is *departure* (Gordon, 1978), in which instructors become mentors and lead students along their first steps toward knowledge. Campbell’s second

stage of the monomyth is *initiation* (Gordon, 1978). During this stage, the hero faces a sequence of more perilous and psychological tests and challenges (Gordon, 1978). In terms of education, this stage would occur for students as the subject matter becomes more challenging; there are greater nuances to understanding and interpreting various concepts and perspectives. It is also during this stage of education whereby students might begin to learn more about themselves and their abilities. Campbell's third stage of the monomyth—*Return*—occurs when students return to a beginning place, having achieved a balance between the light and the dark within themselves (Gordon, 1978). For students, this light and dark balance could equate to an understanding for how they might choose to use the knowledge of the historical world into which they were born. By learning more about the world into which they were born, and the world into which they prepare to enter, students can arrive at an understanding of the cyclical nature of both education and life.

Yet, inevitably, we all reach a point in which we choose to part from our advisors. No matter the effect that we, as teachers and mentors, have on our students, our students will undoubtedly part from us. While we provide them with a pathway to knowledge and understanding, they eventually leave us to pursue their own lives, away from academia (Ellerhoff, 2015). Therefore, a lasting lesson that teachers must ensure to pass along to their students is the lesson of failure. Failure remains, perhaps, our most important teachers. We learn from others' failures as we grow and we, in turn, must share the knowledge of our failures with others. In our childhood, we often see in our teachers the person that we want to become. As adults, we often see in ourselves the person that we have failed to become.

Political Education Embodied in the Carter Presidency: Failures, Forgiveness, and Faith

While we must learn from failure, we must not let it define us. This idea circles back to Arendt's concept of natality, as well as the subject of this dissertation, the presidency of Jimmy Carter and his "Crisis of Confidence" address. Both can serve as a study in speech, history, and political action. His political achievements and failures provide astute lessons in leadership. Carter can be an exemplar for future historical moments in which attention to multiple perspectives is crucial for interpretation, derivation of meaning, and political action. His presidency can also serve as a study in ethics as it pertains to political action, which can be used to enhance speech, history, and civics education.

As President, Carter had attempted to pursue the "right things . . . for the benefit of the country while ignoring the great political costs to himself" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 835). Attempting to pass comprehensive energy legislation within the first 90 days of his term, spearheading the Panama Canal Treaty, presiding over "the first peace treaty between Israel and any Arab country," and placing "the lives of the Iranian hostages before all other diplomatic and security considerations" strangely caused Carter to lose much of the support that had swept him into the White House (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 835). As has been stated a number of times previously throughout this dissertation, Carter had fallen victim to the Washington D.C. special interests, and had failed to effectively navigate the rough political waters, often alienating those whom he counted on for support by refusing to play political games. When the time came for him to seek reelection in 1980:

The party's institutional opinion makers, against whom he had run [in 1976], held great sway over the success of his initiatives as president, and now over his reelection. And for the leaders of such groups, who, wrongly or rightly, felt slighted, Carter's campaign for reelection was payback time." (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 836).

In the end, following Carter's landslide defeat by Ronald Reagan, it was apparent that, despite his most conscientious efforts to lead the American people in a new direction, Carter had, ultimately and for a number of reasons, failed to win the nation's confidence for a second term (Eizenstat, 2018).

While Carter proved himself to be a strong leader, full of professional and personal integrity and honor, with the best intentions for the nation in his heart, he simply "wasn't a good politician" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 892). In the end, Carter himself maintained a rather sportsperson-like attitude toward his election downfall, telling those in attendance at a senior staff meeting shortly after the election, "We need to stop analyzing our defeat . . . and we need to stress our accomplishments. The fact is we just got our ass whipped" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 893). He added further, "We tackled tough problems . . . We need to tell an accurate history of what we did" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 894). Carter was not about to dwell on his failures. Rather, he embodied Arendt's concept of natality by learning from his mistakes and charting a new civic course (Maier, 2016). He has always owned his failures throughout the years since his one term as President, using them as teaching lessons in the many books he has written in the ensuing decades. Yet, they are only part of his story. Overall, he has remained more focused on his successes and the good he managed to do for the country. In this sense, Carter, once

again, embodied Niebuhr's belief that, while leaders cannot control the path of history, they can influence historical events, thereby shaping national and international narratives (Halliwell, 2005). By seeking to tell his story, and by allowing the events of his presidency to unfold in a full narrative, Carter carved out a space within the American national tapestry.

In his farewell address, Carter encapsulated his attitude toward political life, that despite no longer being the nation's president, he intended "to return home to the South, where I was born and raised . . . I intend to work as a citizen, as I've worked here in this office as president, for the values this nation was founded to secure" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 894; Carter, 1981). In this way, Carter mirrors Augustine's philosophy of true love, which posits that a desire for such love is a desire to remain close to God, and that kind of love calls each one of us to perform acts of service. Therefore, by extension, the highest good is not ourselves, but the creator (Arnett, 2013). This last sentiment has been a recurring one throughout Carter's personal and professional life.

Prior to retreating to his home in Georgia, Carter concluded his final months as President with a productive series of moves that proved "the equal or better than that of any departing president in a post-election congressional session, when he was the lamest of lame ducks" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 895). He resisted an attempted, cosmetic push by outgoing Democrats to cut taxes, insisting on maintaining a record of fiscal responsibility to the very end; he signed into law the Alaska Lands Act, "which in a single stroke of his presidential pen doubled the size of our National Park System and protected huge wilderness areas from being despoiled by mining and drilling for oil and gas" (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 895). He also signed into legislation the Superfund, which spurred a cleanup of

the most polluted industrial wastelands (Eizenstat, 2018). Perhaps most significantly, Carter worked tirelessly until the final days of his presidency for an agreement that would secure the release of the Iranian hostages, which occurred during the first minutes of the Reagan administration (Eizenstat, 2018).

These are only few of the successes of the Carter administration. Yet, they are often overlooked. Americans in the modern age have a tendency to focus on negative, the failures, rather than on the overall picture. The ability to shape political opinion both positively and negatively is a power that we must remain cognizant of. We must remind ourselves (and be reminded by others) that “power has been both abused and contained, that power has both degraded and healed, that power not only corrupts but power vacuums corrupt” (Burns, 1976, p. xii). It is important to remember that even the supposedly successful presidents, at times, failed. Burns (1976) points to several cases in which presidents’ decisions had negative and often embarrassing outcomes:

“Teddy Roosevelt summoning the Speaker of the House to the White House as a test of strength, and failing; Woodrow Wilson dominating Congress and meeting final defeat at the hands of the Senate . . . Franklin Roosevelt managing Congress with supreme skill and yet humbled in his effort to limit judicial power; Truman carefully mobilizing the full strength of the executive leadership in his administration before sacking General MacArthur and thus defying the general’s supporters on the Hill” (p. xii).

Each example suggests that all presidents experience a full spectrum of success and failure during their tenures in the White House. Yet, interestingly, presidents such as both Roosevelt’s, and Wilson and Truman to an extent, are forgiven for their limitations and

missteps by those who attempt to shape political and historical opinion. Why is this often not the case with Jimmy Carter?

Arendt, once again, provides us with an interesting perspective from which to glean some clarity on the matter. She crafted the notion of spaces of appearance, which are “the geographical location[s] of those activities in which human beings build civic relationships that transcend the particular time that each human being is on earth” (Gorham, 2000, p. 29). In these spaces, human actions can create a “realm where people can aspire to immortal fame” (Gorham, 2000, p. 34; Arendt, 1968b, p. 4, 10; d’Entreves, 1994, p. 143). The capacity for such actions is made possible through the human power of promise and forgiveness, whereby the two qualities enable us to “create and sustain the space of appearance” in spite of the many crises that we face (Gorham, 2000, p. 34). Jimmy Carter made a promise to the American people when he became president, a promise that he reiterated during his “Crisis of Confidence” speech. He said to the viewing audience on that July evening, “I promised you a president who is not isolated from the people, who feels your pain, and who shares your dreams, and who draws his strength and his wisdom from you” (Carter, 1979). Carter also confessed that his legislative efforts as president to that point had only achieved “mixed success” (Carter, 1979). Carter asked for help from the American people, yet, when Carter stumbled and, inevitably erred, as all presidents have, the people, as well as the “history-makers,” failed to help and forgive him.

Forgiveness is a final key aspect of politics, and a final key element of education. If we, as teachers, plan to teach students to become future leaders of our polis, to engage in political action, then we must instill in them an awareness of the importance of

forgiveness. For Wolterstorff (2011), an act of error or wrongdoing is part of an individual's personal (and, perhaps, professional) history. Yet, an act of forgiveness for such errors makes it plain that the wrongdoing is not part of an individual's moral history. In other words, it is not considered something that "contribute[d] to his moral condition" (p. 170; Giannini, 2017). Therefore, for Carter, his errors in judgement and failures in office do not, nor should they, define his character nor his presidency overall. Yet, the critics have often attempted to define his presidency, and thus his character, based on their shortcomings. As members of a polity, we must renounce and work toward overcoming our negative judgements toward presidents and political leaders whom we perceive as having wronged us by way of their legislative policies (Giannini, 2017).

By doing so, we can allow for love to penetrate the political realm. In our biased political perspectives, we can often harbor "resentment and other negative reactive emotions" that influence us to view leaders with hostility for the mere fact that their political beliefs differ from ours and those whom we share similar ideological beliefs. By allowing love to enter into politics, we can, at least to some extent, see the good in those leaders (Giannini, 2017). As Niebuhr (2015) states, "Even forgiveness comes partially into the category of love as law. For we are warned that if we forgive not men their trespasses neither will our heavenly Father forgive our trespasses" (pp. 840-841). We must, therefore, be willing to allot a level of forgiveness and love toward even those political leaders toward whom we disagree and even harbor levels of resentment. By doing so we can, hopefully, restore one another's faith in our political processes. In the words of President Carter (1979), "We simply must have faith in each other, faith in our ability to govern ourselves, and faith in the future of this nation." Through faith and hope,

forgiveness and love, we can assume the role of a derivative self, which allows us love our neighbors and attend to them (Arnett, 2013). As teachers, we can attend to our students by rethinking our educational practices and bringing together the worlds of theatre and politics in our pedagogy, so that political life for our students might be experienced and not simply observed (Gorham, 2000).

Lilja (2018) maintains, “One of the most important tasks for education in liberal democracies has been to foster the next generation in core democratic values in order to prepare them for future political responsibilities” (p. 537). The task should be handled with care, given the temptation for educators to teach according to their own biases, and/or the administrative biases, rather than objective material. From her perspective, Hannah Arendt considered education “a fundamental requirement for the establishment of a common world, or the most effective tool for its destruction,” depending on its use as either a tool of the state or the nation (Lilja, 2018, p. 537). She was not against public engagement in schools; rather, she was opposed to pushing students too rapidly toward participation in the public realm before their maturity (Schutz and Sandy, 2015). Clearly, Arendt saw the possibility for the academic pendulum to swing excessively to both sides. Yet, arguably, in our historical moment, the academy must be willing to walk that ever so fine line that Arendt articulates. Public speaking, history and civics education are increasingly more essential to academia, particularly given the continued relegation of the humanities to secondary status behind STEM and business curriculums, and action to reverse this course must be taken.

The diminishment of the humanities runs contrary to a trend throughout much of the twentieth-century, whereby the goal of education in America had been “to foster the

next generation in line with the foundational values of democracy in order to prepare them to resume responsibility for our political future” (Lilja, 2018, p. 538). This philosophy was an attempt at countering the spread of Communism and Nazism during the early to mid-part of the century (Gorham, 2000). Educators tasked themselves with protecting the outstanding scholarly works of the past, while instilling in students a desire to maintain and even restore our human world (Mihaila et al., 2016). For Arendt, however, a crisis in education emerged out of the post-World War II era. Whereas she considered tradition, conservatism, and authority to be key values of education, she described what she perceived to be a decline in these values, coinciding with a breakdown of the boundary between public and private, thereby exposing youth to the public realm too early (Monig, 2012). As a result, being American today is more synonymous with political detachment (Gorham, 2000), and this detachment is exacerbated by a dearth of public speaking, history, and civics in higher education.

Our political environment is now quite troubled. Given a rudderless political education for our students in academia, objective facts and interpretations of historical moments are less influential in society than personal opinion, and students grow evermore distrustful of political elites (Lilja, 2018; Foa and Mounk, 2017). This lineage traces even as far back as Descartes, whereby “men did not hold the world in common, but rather the structure of their minds, which ‘they cannot have in common, strictly speaking’” (Gorham, 2000, p. 52; Arendt, 1958b, p. 257). Viewpoints and perspectives are now increasingly individualized, while trust in political institutions continues to decline. The sense of civic trust between the political and the public that Jimmy Carter had attempted to restore during his days in office has not fully materialized. Therefore, it

is up to educators to pick up Carter's mantle. Professors must impress upon students the idea that political engagement is fundamental to the existence of a common world, shared by men and women, engaging regularly in both speech and action (Lilja, 2018).

Inevitably, speech leads *to* action, which, for Arendt, ultimately binds action to freedom (Lilja, 2018). Yet, freedom must not be confused with free will. In *Confessions* (1992), Saint Augustine argues that man is sinful and, through his free will, clings to material items rather than to spiritual ones. It is this clinging to the material world that buries man in sin and prevents him from knowing God. Augustine's position on the nature of free will is "a Christian-inspired notion of freedom" that, when used interchangeably with a more secularized notion of freedom, actually leads to a *loss* in the latter. (Lilja, 2018; Topolski, 2015, p. 61). Professors must articulate the similarities and differences to our students, and also impart upon them Arendt's concept of plurality—our existence in a world with other individuals and their capacity for different perspectives—as necessary for navigating historical moments (Mihaila, et al., 2016). Carter's attempt to navigate the tumultuous waters of his historical moment can offer students a vivid backdrop against which to visualize and play out political situations, thereby sharpening their civic sensibilities.

Implications for Higher Education and Reflections on the Carter Presidency

As Gorham (2000) states, "For most people, most of the time, politics is an activity that is observed, not experienced" (p. 1). To alter this perception, he advocates for the implementation of theatrical concepts into our communication and political courses within the humanities. This can inspire the creation of a more participatory learning space. Hannah Arendt "loved the public space of politics for the robust clarity it

gave to the business of living together,” and argued for a “political republic based on common interest” (Stonebridge, 2019, par. 5). Arendt’s perspective on political engagement was shaped largely through her experiences dealing with national upheaval and German anti-Semitism during the World War II years that challenged her right to exist (Stonebridge, 2019). For Arendt, these experiences forced her to realize that the alienation of others from the political forum was a humanitarian problem that had to be dealt with (Stonebridge, 2019). While she advocated for political equality, she also believed that politics and education should remain separate. Rather, she believed, the job of educators “is to accept authority over children, introducing them to the world of history and objects into which they have been born” (Schutz & Sandy, 2015, p. 22). That way, when the time came, students could enter the political realm free of any indoctrination that could influence them to engage in totalitarian practices. Various scholars, both during and since Arendt’s time, have both agreed and disagreed with her position on these matters.

Regardless of perspective, Arendt was right in her assessment that education is in a state of crisis. The academy must attempt to counter this crisis by “making [students] ready to an existence of action” (Mihaila, et al., 2015, p. 915). Professors must retain authority over students since students “carry with them the capacity for restoring the human world” (Mihaila, et al., 2015, p. 916). However, before venturing into the world, students must receive an education that gives them adequate knowledge of the world through public speaking, history, and civics.

There are four key things that universities and university professors can do to improve their communication curriculums in these areas:

- “Universities can be sites of drama”
- “Universities can make politics more interesting to students by employing new methods of instruction”
- “University professors can use narrative to grip their audiences”
- “Universities can stir the desire to play by getting their students involved in political activities”; “Universities [can] involve students and faculty as spectators to the comedy and tragedy of academic life” (Gorham, 2000, pp. 104-106).

As it stands currently, there are a number of American colleges and universities that have combined Communication and Theatre Arts departments. The argument here is that more, and perhaps all, of our American institutions should combine those departments, thereby making communication curriculum humanities-based. We will expand upon this argument by examining Gorham’s four points in greater detail.

First, that universities can exist as dramatic sites, is a realization of Shakespeare’s famous adage, “All the world’s a stage.” Settings of higher education can serve as a perfect rehearsal space for students to sharpen their communicative abilities and “realize the political nature of their status in the university community” (Gorham, 2000, p. 104). They can do this while living for a time in the between-space of college (Schutz and Sandy, 2015), before their subjection to the live-audience of the very public political realm. Communication curriculums in the areas of speaking and civics can act as instruments of knowledge for students as they prepare not only to enter the political realm, but also to play an effective role within it. The ability to obtain knowledge through communication can, in this way, be enhanced through theatrical perspectives.

Secondly, theatrical elements in communication instruction can make politics more interesting to students. While our classroom technology (videos, PowerPoints, and other online learning services) serves an obvious educational function in making learning more accessible, it does not replace traditional storytelling. Storytelling in the classroom is irreplaceable, since it “cultivates fancy and wonder at the world and compassion for others,” and offers students the opportunity to “think in community” with the concepts being presented (Gorham, 2000, p. 105). While useful, technology is artificial; classroom storytelling is tangible and interpersonal. Since it is said that art imitates life, classroom instructors can use the artful as a means to reveal the political to their students. This line of thought extends to the third of Gorham’s ways of improving communication curriculum, professors using narrative to keep students engaged. People respond to narrative, since narrative is embedded within our collective humanity. It is, therefore, up to the instructor to channel the theatrical, and “play” rather than merely lecture.

All of this leads to the fourth and final way that colleges and universities can improve its political curriculums, by promoting student political engagement. This starts by professors incorporating dramatic pedagogical elements into classroom activity. Doing so will open up new, creative educational avenues for students to explore, thus motivating them to engage more enthusiastically with outside student groups, university governing bodies, etc. This can, in turn, inspire students to more closely observe the historical and current events shaping their nation and the political world, thereby increasing student political engagement and their overall sense of the national political theater.

Theatricality in politics is, perhaps, never more on display than during presidential campaigns. They are “exercises in political theatre, rife with symbolism” (Balmer, 2014, p. 140). Unfortunately for Jimmy Carter, “No politician of recent memory understood that better than Ronald Reagan” (Balmer, 2014, p. 140). This is not to say, however, that Carter was incapable of substantive political drama. He regularly assumed various roles in order to amass a following that enabled his 1976 election victory. In fact, one might hardly think it possible to compare President Donald Trump and Carter. Just to suggest such a comparison could, conceivably, draw smirks and chuckles. Yet, each man successfully, though in very different ways, rode a populist streak into the White House. In a recent article for *Atlanta Magazine*, John Meroney (2020) acknowledges that “Carter, like Trump, shunned political jargon and appealed directly to the American people, refusing to coddle the media yet mesmerizing them to his advantage” (par. 7). Carter’s sense of theatricality did pay dividends in 1976. Yet, during and after the election, Carter experienced a crescendo of support followed by cruel twists of fate (Meroney, 2000) akin to a Shakespearean tragedy.

In response to these events, Carter’s handling of the “Crisis of Confidence” was also theatrical, though not widely appreciated by critics. The speech “came to be ridiculed and maligned as the ‘malaise’ speech, but if the United States had pursued the energy and conservation initiatives he proposed, the nation would be in a far better place (Balmer, 2014, p. 157). Yet, Carter is proof that political life is multi-faceted, and that any person, even a former President of the United States, can lead through action. Carter’s continued humanitarian work, and his commitment to peace and human rights, earned him the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize. Even now, at 95 years of age, Carter remains an

active public figure and a respected statesman. He continues his work to this day, honoring the words he spoke more than forty-years ago:

“Little by little we can and we must rebuild our confidence. We can spend until we empty our treasuries, and we may summon all the wonders of science. But we can succeed only if we tap our greatest resources -- America’s people, America’s values, and America’s confidence.” (Carter, 1979)

A final act of theatricality occurred at the conclusion of Carter’s presidency, and the act effectively symbolized Carter’s stoicism, his leadership, and his enduring ability to respect the past, live within the present, and look forward to the future. Aboard Air Force One, following the release of the U.S. hostages from Iran, Carter was asked to participate in a Champaign toast to celebrate the hostages’ release. Carter did so with the chief flight steward, whom Carter had developed a friendly relationship with, unlike Richard Nixon, who had barely communicated with anyone aboard Air Force One. In a last, symbolic act, the chief steward “handed over the tulip-shaped glass with the presidential seal, and together they drained their glasses” (Eizenstat, 2018, p. 898; Palmer, 2013, 2015). In doing so, Carter appeared to signal the closing of the curtain on the first act of his political life, and the raising of the curtain on the second.

Conclusion

Teaching involves connection. More specifically, it involves communicative engagement and dialogue between instructor and student. During a classroom session, mental, emotional, and (in some cases) spiritual energy is passed from teacher to student, student to teacher, and back again. Education thrives by way of this symbiosis, and discourse is the blood that pumps through the educational process, giving life to it,

making it organic. It is why, even in this age of technological dependence, teacher and student communicative interaction remains essential. Technology is fast-paced and convenient, yet artificial. Classroom instruction is tangible and human. Interaction, pertaining specifically to the exchange of ideas, is a primary reason for one to pursue a career in teaching. It is what makes the profession *worth* pursuing

As a civic educator and storyteller, it has become clear to me that rhetoric, ethics, and drama are powerful educational tools. Words matter a great deal. Unfortunately, we often ignore the negative consequences of our interpersonal communication, particularly during this current historical moment. In response to this, it remains essential to impress upon my students the repercussions that our words often have on society, just as President Carter responded to the crisis of his historical moment and the effects that the nation's actions had on its confidence. In this way, communication becomes an essential human practice, and how we navigate the world's multitude of ethical issues by way of our communication becomes just as essential.

This thinking is only relevant, however, as long as there are students to teach. In the same way that an actor cannot perform without an audience, a teacher cannot teach without students. Further, there cannot be classroom instruction without trust and respect and a proper balance between the technological and the human. Striking this balance can lead to a more balanced student, thereby increasing student success and, more importantly, student learning. When students succeed in the classroom and take their knowledge beyond it, education has served a tremendous purpose. It is direct confirmation of the academy, and it supports the idea that knowledge is a gift that must be shared.

It is, therefore, my goal to influence students in this manner in the hope that they will, in turn, move beyond my classroom and share their knowledge with others who seek it. Through public speaking and civics education, both influenced by history, I intend to present to students the idea that each of them individually can embody the ideals upon which our nation was founded. Through their political involvement, they can individually work to better the nation, so that, collectively, our nation's people demonstrate a "commitment to truth, justice, peace, freedom, humility, human rights, generosity, and the upholding of moral values" (Carter, 2005, p. 199). Success in higher education is dependent upon tapping into our nation's greatest resources, its people—in this specific case, its students—and its confidence (Carter, 1979). In doing so, we educators can pass the torch of knowledge to our students. Simultaneously, we can continue to learn from students who are immersed within their own historical moments, just as we have learned from ours. Through the sharing of our narratives, together we all can become performers with roles to play in our great American narrative.

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