

JONATHAN MYRICK DANIELS '61

HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Inaugural Presentation To

President James Earl Carter

March 29, 2001

Cameron Hall

Virginia Military Institute

President Carter's Speech

APPLAUSE: Thank you very much

Thank you very much to General Bunting and to Virginia Military Institute and all of those involved in this ceremony and my good friend Cabell Brand. To the Deans who have come to honor us on each side and to protect us as the General has said, I want to express my deep appreciation.

I have learned during my career that it is not always deserved when one hears the beautiful words spoken. I have been through this myself. I have always had a difficult time with public speaking. I never was able to tell funny stories. When I was involuntarily retired from the White House by Ronald Reagan in 1980... I always envied his ability to tell a funny story and to get the audience with him. About a year after I left the White House, I went to China which as the General pointed out, we had just normalized relations, and came back through Japan, and I was asked to make the graduating speech at a very small college in Southern Japan. There was no fee involved. When I got there I had just recently been President of the United States, and the President of the College, and their students, and their faculty and their parents were so nervous that they made me nervous; and although the Japanese have a peculiar sense of humor, I decided that I would tell a joke so instead of choosing my funniest joke, I chose my shortest joke because it takes so long to interpret English into Japanese. So when I told my joke to the audience and the interpreter interpreted, the audience collapsed in laughter. It was the best response I have ever had from

telling a joke; and so afterwards, I could not wait to get to the holding room and ask the interpreter, how did you tell my joke? It never went across that well in the United States; and he was very reluctant to respond. He ducked his head and I insisted. I said, "you have got to tell me how you told my joke." He finally said, "I told the audience President Carter told a funny story everyone must laugh."

Well, you can see that sometimes when you think you have accomplished great things, it is not quite as great as you think; but today I am honored to be here, and I would say that is the case with the fee. The Carter Center and its work, and the United States of America really deserve this honor.

At the Carter Center, we have a special mission. We don't duplicate what anyone else does at the United Nations or the World Bank or the U.S. Government, or Harvard University, or if VMI is doing stuff. We do not interfere; we do not compete. We try to fill vacuums in the world. A lot of our work is done by students, undergraduate and graduate students. Every day, we analyze every conflict on earth. You will probably be surprised to know that there are a 110 conflicts on our list. Some of them are dormant. Like right now in Northern Ireland or say in Cypress, but each year about 70 erupt into violence. Last year, there were 71. Thirty of these conflicts on earth now are major wars. We define a major war as one within which a thousand or more soldiers have been killed on the battlefield; and for every soldier killed in modern day war, about 9 civilians perish from stray bullets, bombs, missiles, and a deliberate deprivation of food, shelter and medical care. Almost all of these wars, sometimes in certain years, all of them are civil wars... not between two nations, but inside the country.

The Carter Center also tries to resolve conflicts. We meet with warring parties, their leaders, and we try to bring about a cease fire first and then a permanent treaty of peace. One way we do that, by the way, is to convince both warring parties once they decide they cannot win on the battlefield that maybe they should have an election. Since we are involved in their countries already with education and health programs and agriculture programs, they quite often turn to us, and we use the principle of politics which is based on self-delusion. If you think for just a moment, anyone running for office is convinced that if the election is honest, and the people know me and know these other jokers, surely they will vote for me. So what the Carter Center does is get both leaders, at separate times and tell them let us hold an honest election, and we are sure the best person will be elected President; so we are deeply involved in a number of elections around the world. Last year the Carter Center monitored six elections; and I have just come back last week from Guyana, a small country in the northern part of South America.

Our main program at the Carter Center is to deal with health programs. We are eradicating a major disease called guinea worm, and we concentrate on other diseases, primarily those involving blindness. Trachoma is a disease the number one cause of preventable blindness. We are treating trachoma. Another one is onchocerciasis or river blindness. Last year, the Carter Centers' people went into villages and personally delivered to people 7.4 million doses of medicine that if taken one dose a year will prevent blindness; so our reach is really among the first people on earth who suffer from preventable diseases, and we also teach about 600,000 farmers today in twelve nations and in Africa how to grow more food grain. So that is very quickly a gamut of the things the Carter Center does which I think has convinced this group to award this beautiful bronze statue.

Since we have left the White House, Rosalynn and I have visited 120 nations... among them the poorest nations on earth. The Carter Centers' programs are now active in 65 countries, 35 of those in Africa. As the new millennium arrived, I was asked to make a speech in Norway and later in Taiwan to analyze the greatest challenge that the world places in this millennium. After observing the situation in so many countries, I was convinced, and I am still convinced that the greatest challenge that we face in this millennium is the growing disparity between rich people and poor people. This can be seen in our community, but it becomes even more evident when you compare the richest countries in the world with the poorest nations on earth. I looked up some statistics. In 1900, the gap between the poorest countries and the richest countries was 9 to 1. In 1960, the ratio was 30 to 1, now the ratio is 72 to 1. The ten richest nations are 72 times as wealthy as the 10 poorest countries in the world. Over half of the people on earth live on less than \$2.00 a day; and 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1.00 per day for food, clothing, shelter, and you might say an absence of education and health care.

This is a fact that should impress itself on everyone who believes in highest principles of human life; and we in the most advanced country on earth should have this as a major pre-occupation, not only as a nation but as individuals.

Recently, I wrote a book (that Rosalynn would like for me to announce) it is still on sale... It is called "*An Hour Before Daylight*," and it is about my life on a farm in south Georgia between the time I was 4 years old and the time I went off to go to the Naval Academy and to serve in the U.S. Navy. It tells two stories about America which sometimes we tend to forget or deliberately want to forget...

One was the great depression, when poverty in America was as bad as I have just described in many of the third world countries. My father was a landowner, any my book is about life on my father's farm. We had three different categories of people in our community and walking by our house on the U.S. Highway 280 or riding in open boxcars on the Seaboard Airline Railway. In one category, there

were people who did not have a home or a job. Twenty-five percent of Americans were unemployed. The second category were people who had a place to live and had a job by the day, and by the day meant that people worked in the fields when it was not raining, or the soil was not too wet. Those fortunate people on our farm and others were paid a dollar a day for a grown man to work from an hour before daylight when the bell rang on our farm until sundown... and the highest level of status economically and socially among those who were not landowners themselves was sharecropper. A sharecropper was someone who had been a day laborer that works hard enough and saved enough money and had sound enough judgment to own his own mules, and his own plow stocks, and his own wagon; and they worked on someone else farm, like my father's. The average per capita income of a sharecropper in Georgia during the great depression was \$75.00 a year. This means that our nation has felt the same plight that is now being experienced by many people around the world, but we had hope because our country was strong and vigorous, and we were endowed with great natural resources, and we lived at peace.

The other part of the story was that this was a time of segregation, when in Plains, Georgia and throughout my state and in Virginia and throughout the nation, Americans lived under a Supreme Court ruling of separate but equal... which meant that racial discrimination and racial segregation were the law of our land. This situation existed in the United States of America for about 100 years from the 1860's when the war between the states was over and the 1960's when we finally had the voting rights act... and a guarantee under the law that Americans regardless of race were to be treated equally.

I lived in that time. I did not have any white neighbors. All of my neighbors were black families. My playmates were black. We fought with each other wrestled, played, went fishing, hunted, and worked in the fields together. I wrote about this, and I also realize in retrospect that there was no voice raised in those days by white liberals or black activist to say this must stop. It was fifteen years after I left the farm. It was 25 years before the tragic event in 1965; and during that time, Americans were self satisfied that is white Americans were, that our way of life is the best on earth.

I think now is the time for us to take a look at our attitude toward those who live in deprivation and about whom we are callous or unconcerned or even unaware. I was in a submarine as a young officer in 1948 when Harry Truman made the first real move to end racial discrimination. He ordained by presidential order that there would be no more racial discrimination in the military services, and it was a shock to us and to the rest of the country. It would have been impossible then to get the Congress to agree, but Harry Truman did it. And he had a Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, a graduate of this Institution who exemplified for the

first time in the history of our country what civil rights or human rights really meant.

Recently, there was an analysis of the ten greatest decisions made by any government on earth in the previous century, and one of those ten decisions was that announced by George C. Marshall. Under Harry Truman's leadership with the Marshall Plan... it is not possible now for us to access the innovation or the startling surprise that existed around the world when at the end of the second world war Harry Truman and George C. Marshall decided to embed human rights in the consciousness of all of those who lived. Instead of being punitive to the people in Germany who had supported Hitler or those in Italy who had supported Mussolini, or those in Japan who attacked us at Pearl Harbor, Harry Truman and George C. Marshall said, "let's treat the people with respect. Lets let them rebuild their lives, let's let them join us in the Democratic world."

This was a transforming experience for all nations, and the heritage of George C. Marshall, who came from this great university has been I think not adequately recognized by people who examine history and who take for granted the blessings that exist in our country and throughout the developed world.

It is hard for us to look at our own blessings, and quite often we assume that we are blessed because we are somehow superior. God is rewarding us for our exalted status in life, and it is that self-serving egocentric attitude that prevents our hearts and our minds from reaching out to those on earth who still suffer. We can enjoy our privileges with the complete immunity from any sense of guilt or a desire for exploration of better things.

All of us want to be successful in life. It is an innate trade of human kind. .. and I have wondered a lot about the definition of success. On the farm when I was a boy except for my mother and father, there were five people who shaped my life, who embedded in me my moral values, my ambitions. Of those five only two were white... and how to analyze that seemingly peculiar situation is not easy.

I teach Sunday School in a little church in Plains all the days that I am there about 35 to 40 times a year, and one of the lessons from the Bible has impressed me as an answer to that question. What is success in life? Most of us would assume that success is the size of a bank account or the beauty of our home, or how many automobiles we have, or how many times our names have been on television, or the radio or in the newspapers or how long we live. But, as a matter of fact, none of those things is a measurement of success. So what is? This is an ancient question. It is one asked by the Corinthians to St. Paul, and Paul, as described in the second Corinthians, gave a very mysterious answer. He said, "the things that are important in the eyes of God, the things that measure success, the things that are permanent in value, are the things you cannot see."

What are the things you cannot see that measure the success of a human being in the eyes of God? They are the things that characterize the life of Jesus and other great and worshipped people... a commitment to justice, to peace. I would say humility, compassion, service, forgiveness, love and those characteristics are available to any person regardless of education or social status of the environment within which we have lived. They are available to us all, and I think that is one of the lessons I have learned that teaches us that others whom we might consider to be in some way inferior in the eyes of God are equal to us.

I would like to read 3 or 4 lines that have made a great impression on me recently. These are the words of a great man. He was addressing a group of students about to graduate. He said I have three wishes for you. "I wish you the joy of a purposeful life..." a life with a purpose. "I wish you new worlds and the vision to see them. I wish you the decency and nobility of which you are capable." Those words were spoken by the Valedictorian of VMI in 1961. His name was Jonathan Daniels, and they still ring true.