

A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power. By Jimmy Carter. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 211 pages. \$28.00.

<http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Jimmy-Carter>. Review by J. Steven Svoboda.

Former US president Jimmy Carter has written a book on women and gender that richly deserves superlatives in a broad number of categories. Unfortunately for the author, the distinctions of this work are almost entirely (around 99.9%) negative.

Let's start with the basics. Much to my surprise, on reading this book, I discovered that Jimmy Carter is quite possibly simultaneously the most insecure and the most egotistical author I have ever read. This is not something I say lightly, nor is it an insignificant achievement, dubious though it may be.

Virtually every page is peppered with Carter's pronouncements of his own fearless, illustrious achievements to advance female welfare throughout the world. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)? Carter claims credit as it happened during his presidency. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)? Ditto. Appointment of many more females to cabinet positions than had ever happened previously? The same. Presidential pardons? Jimmy Carter, fearless crusader for the well-being of women, did it all and broke all existing records. Women as judges? You guessed it, Carter yet again.

Occasionally Carter chivalrously allows as how his wife Rosalynn might have helped a bit on a few matters, and from time to time he mentions female heads of state and other luminaries who also assisted, never failing at a chance to glorify himself by implication while ostensibly praising others. Of course some of us see CEDAW and VAWA as at best dubious accomplishments but that is another matter.

This book really starts to seem like a joke after a while. Is there nothing women have accomplished that wasn't spearheaded by our 39th president, who clearly considers himself an honorary woman? Not only does it come off in the end as anti-feminist, a result I'm sure the author didn't intend (no woman could do anything without a man—Carter's—assistance) but his boasting to advance himself of the numerous achievements he cites regarding third world women's welfare comes off as exploitative and imperialistic. Latrines in third world countries? The Carter Foundation did it. Monitoring the election process in Liberia, which resulted in Africa's first female leader? That was Reagan. Just kidding. Carter once again.

Next question: Is there anything good about men (other than Carter) at all? Or for that matter, any challenge that they face in their life? Has a woman ever behaved other than angelically in the history of the world? The answer would seem to be no to all these questions, judging from this book. Carter talks of "humility" being needed to change social norms, seemingly unaware of his utter lack of this quality.

The book has no footnotes. How could it? I have no clue how Carter would be able to back up such fabrications as the suggestion that "women suffer the most during and

after war ? Really? Women suffer more than the countless men who *die*? So many of its platitudes are completely not subject to being documented.

The factual elisions become almost breathtaking after a while. One can almost glimpse points where the author may have had a momentary passing chance to glimpse a vision of a more nuanced view of gender in the world today, and then, whoosh!, the moment passed and Carter reverted to the more comfortable man-bad, woman-good dichotomy that dominates his book. One point when things might have played out differently comes at the end of the first chapter, which Carter finishes with the sentence, "I still believe...there should not be any distinctions in rules of behavior for males and females." Fair enough, and yet in the very next sentence, which starts the second chapter, the author leaps into a discussion of his time serving as a Naval officer during World War II. Does the thought even cross his brain to address the obvious distinction in "rules of behavior for males and females" in regards to who had to fight and who didn't? Not to mention the special contribution males have made to all wars and especially to this most critical of all wars. It doesn't occur to Carter even for a moment or if it does, he hides it well.

Another point where the author really had to work at keeping his blinders on is when he talks about incarceration *percentages* for black women rising astronomically while completely neglecting the much higher *numbers* of incarcerated *males* and particularly of black *males*. He takes at face value the report of the UN's special rapporteur on violence against *women* (it goes without saying that there is no such special rapporteur on violence against men) that incarceration conditions for women are worse than those for men, even though this flies in the face of everything we know about prisoners and about women's preferential treatment. The author's analysis of date rape is similarly one-sided.

Carter decries a system "based on the presumption that men and boys are superior to women and girls," yet constructs a system that makes the diametrically opposite assumption and recites it like an incantation throughout this 200-page book that seems oh so much longer than it is.

No book is totally without any redeeming value, and Carter's is no exception, though he comes close! In terms of the craft of writing per se, he is a fine writer and the book is attractively produced. His perspective is interesting that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would not be possible to pass in today's world given the increased polarization between countries, the fading influence of the five permanent United Nations members, and that memories of the devastation wrought by World War II have faded. I believe the author is right on all counts here.

Jimmy Carter has written about twenty other books and for all I know the others are all excellent. He won the Nobel Peace Prize, although certainly that is not an infallible bellwether as it was also prematurely given to Barack Obama. But *A Call to Action* reads like an infomercial for all things Jimmy Carter and a boring and monumentally

biased one at that. Avoid at all costs what quite surprisingly turned out to be clearly the worst book I have ever reviewed out of over two hundred volumes.

The reason for Carter receiving this "prize" from me is the author's eminently unforgivable treatment of the pay difference between men and women. We have known for many years that almost all gender-based pay distinctions arise from differences in men's and women's work behavior, as was extensively documented by Warren Farrell in *Why Men Earn More*. Over and over, numbers presenting aggregated pay for men compared to aggregated pay for women are presented by Carter as if they have any meaning whatsoever. Our 39th president, like Michael Moore, tries to raise himself up by attacking the monolithic (and defenseless) entity of "men." This is the face of evil, folks. He talks near the end of the book of "reducing sexual violence of *all* kinds" [italics added]. Really? All kinds? Or only the kinds that will win you approval from feminists?

Carter's one departure from feminist brainwashing is his trouble with abortion. Amazing he was honest about this; it may blow his chances to be promoted to sainthood by the National Organization for Women and the author seems to crave recognition and acknowledgement like no one I've ever encountered before. And I'm politically left of center and considered the man one of the less objectionable presidents when in office. Jimmy Carter has managed to pull off an epic achievement in reverse. Save your money and your brain and avoid it at all costs.