

Transcendence: The Jimmy Carter Story
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The movie centers around the day President Carter tried to secretly rescue the U.S. hostages being held in Iran –April 24th, 1980. One of the great challenges of this day was that the President had to pretend that nothing was happening and had to go about a normal schedule while events in Iran continued. In this scene, the president has to meet with leaders of the Hispanic community to explain the economic austerity measures he has implemented, which in all likelihood will hurt this constituency. This meeting takes places right before the upcoming election. At a lunch meeting right before this meeting, the president learned that one of the helicopters experienced problems crossing into Iran. Already the mission is in trouble, but it is continuing.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE -DAY

April 24th, 1980, Washington. Meeting room overcrowded with press and participants. Jimmy is uncomfortable at the head table. Emphasis is on the procedural.

CABINET MEMBER: (V.O.)

...and so the Carter administration has always been concerned with the welfare of the Hispanic community in the United States, and it is in that spirit that we have asked you -important leaders of that community -to the White House to explain our anti-inflation program and fair housing initiatives.

Cabinet Member is at the podium with Jimmy.

CABINET MEMBER (Cont.)

Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States.

Burst of flash bulbs seems to disorient Jimmy. The response from the audience is polite but skeptical.

JIMMY:

(Distracted)

I am glad you could come here today... You all should have copies of the initiative.

For a moment it seems he won't continue.

JIMMY: (Cont.)

When I became president, one of my greatest challenges was to redirect federal programs to aid people in need. I succeeded an administration that told our nation's largest city to drop dead. It had the same callous attitude toward minorities, the poor, the elderly, and the unemployed.

Uncertain pause.

JIMMY: (Cont.)

Let us never forget that this fight is for economic justice as much as for economic stability.

Other concerns are racing through Jimmy's head.

HOSTAGE WIFE (V.O.)

(Telephone conversation)

Mister President, I can't tell you how much we all appreciate your personally staying in contact with us.

JIMMY (V.O.)

(Telephone)

I know how much you must miss your loved ones and I want you to know that we are doing all we can to bring them home alive.

HOSTAGE WIFE: (V.O.)

We talk together, a lot, the other relatives of the hostages, and we were saying how difficult it must be for you. We see in the paper every day people criticizing you for not going in and bombing Iran and just killing everybody -killing my husband.

JIMMY: (V.O.)

So long as I am in office, we will always put the lives of our American hostages above politics. My only goal is to bring them home a live.

Fade to the end of his phone conversation with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, moments earlier.

BROWN: (V.O.)

(Telephone)

...Mister president, Colonel Beckwith warned us there may be problems with the helicopters crossing into the desert. We have always known that we could lose up to two helicopters which is why we planned to take eight. There is no reason to abort the mission

JIMMY: (V.O.)

(Telephone)

All right, then: maintain radio silence. Let me know when we find out anything, especially the status of those men. If they are detected and still in Iran, we've got a problem. Otherwise, the mission is proceeding as scheduled. It's still going to work!

Fade to Jimmy completing his speech to the Hispanic group.

JIMMY:

...the pie we divide today is not growing because of inflation and we must get it growing again to continue the battle for social and economic justice we began nearly fifty-years ago. I will answer any questions at this time.

Member of the Hispanic community rises to speak.

MAN:

President Carter, we are concerned that in your efforts to be fiscally responsible and balance the budget you will cut programs that are important to our community and that will further set our people back.

SOUND OF HELICOPTERS subtle in the background, growing.

JIMMY:

If you look carefully at the prospective cuts you will notice that key programs such as bilingual education have not been cut.

(Beat.)

But as I am sure you know, in these difficult economic times, everyone, including members of the Hispanic community, will be asked to make some sacrifices for the good of the country.

As the discussion continues, focus on two Carter STAFFERS at the meeting.

STAFF ONE:

(Hushed whisper)

Jesus, can you believe he's doing it again?

STAFF TWO:

(Hushed whisper)

Right in the middle of primaries.

JIMMY: (V.O.)

It is all very important that all of us...

Jimmy fades into the background.

STAFF ONE:

Has he let up on you guys at all these days?

STAFF TWO:

No way. He's sending legislation to the hill like there's no tomorrow.

STAFF ONE:

Yeah, well there might not be.

(Beat)

Remember when we tried to get him to prioritize all this shit?

STAFF TWO:

Remember his solution to the problem?

STAFF ONE:

Said it all right then.

STAFF TWO:

I should have handed in my registration at that very moment.

JIMMY:

I'm not saying it will be easy, but...

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE -DAY

Memory of the Staffers, early in Carter Presidency, 1977. Staff is running around swamped in a mass of paper work.

STAFF ONE:

Do we have the legislation on the proposed Department of Education?

STAFF TWO:

Screw the Department of Education. I'm up to my ass in legislative reform.

STAFF THREE:

I'll trade you both your Department of Education and legislative reform for these new proposed policies on health care and energy.

STAFF FOUR:

(Out of frustration)

Has anybody seen what has happened to the Panama Canal?

STAFF FIVE:

(Quickly, comic)

I want to point out that since we have come to the White House less than six months ago, our President has sent up or is proposing legislation for the Department of Energy, a Department of Education, deregulation of banks, airlines, trucking, communications, and railroads, government efficiency -fire people and reduce paper work -is giving the Panama Canal back to the Panamanians, Mid-East peace, environment, SALT, beat-down special interests, health care, national energy policy, eliminating wasteful water and dam projects; kill pork barrel, kill the B-1 bomber and initiate high tech defense programs such as the stealth fighters

STAFF FOUR:

Taken on all the hot-button issues in Washington - health care, energy, legislative reform,

STAFF THREE:

Pissed off everybody.

STAFF FOUR:

Pissed off everybody, and what is more to the point, about killed his staffers because he keeps cutting his own staff to prove that there is waste in government while he puts more legislation before Congress than any president has ever done in the history of this country!

STAFF ONE:

Yeah, well I've got an idea I'm going to propose to him.

STAFF TWO:

That he find another job?

Staff One holds up three envelopes, one red, one yellow, and one green.

STAFF ONE:

Prioritize: The red envelope is for high priority legislation; yellow is medium priority, and green is low priority. We simply force him to decide which is which.

STAFF THREE:

Brilliant.

STAFF TWO:

That's just common practice.

STAFF FOUR:

He can't say no to that.

Jimmy enters causing shift in the demeanor of everyone.

STAFF TWO:

Mr. President!

STAFFERS:

(Echoing)

Mr. President.

JIMMY:

Gather round everyone, I have an announcement to make.

As Jimmy speaks, AIDE is passing out materials.

JIMMY: (Cont.)

Now, I understand that the amount of work we are attempting to get through Congress is burdensome on a lot of you.

STAFF ONE:

(Whispering to Staff Two)

Thank God, he's finally seen the light.

JIMMY:

I have heard that staffers are having a hard time keeping up with the sheer volume of information. So what I am proposing I think will be welcome

relief to everyone. I look forward to our continued good work.

Jimmy turns to exit as the Staff reads the material.

STAFF THREE:

(Shocked)

Speed reading classes?

STAFF TWO:

That son of a bitch!

STAFF ONE:

That's it. I can't take anymore. (Calling for him)
Mister President! Mister President!

Staff One makes a beeline for Jimmy carrying the three folders.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE MEETING ROOM -DAY

April 24th, 1980. Return to the meeting for Hispanics.

STAFF TWO:

(Whispering)

You remember what he did with your little folders?

STAFF ONE:

(Whispering)

He listened to what I had to say, then he put every single piece of legislation in the red folder.

STAFF TWO:

We should've gotten a new job right then.

STAFF ONE:

I could've been a goddamned fireman.

The meeting has become increasingly contentious.

MAN ONE:

Mr. President. Do you realize you are asking people to make sacrifices and that you are enacting these very unpopular programs right before an election?

JIMMY:

I am aware of the fact that there is an upcoming presidential election. I don't think that should dissuade us from doing what is right.

MAN TWO

President Carter, with all due respect, please remember the support you received from the Hispanic community, and remember, we will recommend to our constituency that they vote for the candidate who is most sensitive to our interests. Good afternoon, sir.

The Hispanic contingent leaves the meeting. Jimmy reacts with a look of anger, determination, and frustration that is familiar, and reminiscent of another time.

ROSALYNN: (V.O.)

You could just stay home today.

JIMMY: (V.O.)

I could.

ROSALYNN: (V.O.)

You could say that you were sick. There is something going around.

JIMMY: (V.O.)

Flu, I think. They say almost a third of the teachers are out at the school.

ROSALYNN: (V.O.)

Right. You could just stay home sick. You could just avoid the whole thing.

CUT TO:

INT.. PLAINS, GEORGIA CARTER HOME -DAY .

Bedroom, Carter's house, 1950's. Jimmy is preparing to leave for work.

JIMMY
I could just avoid the whole thing.

ROSALYNN:
We hardly have any customers in the warehouse
since this all started!

No response from Jimmy.

ROSALYNN: (Cont.)
They are not going to like it if you cross them!

JIMMY:
No, I don't expect they will.

Jimmy exits. Rosalynn follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARTER HOME -CONTINUOUS

ROSALYNN:
(Calling after him)
Jimmy, It isn't hard enough for us to come back to
live in Plains, now we have to live here and be
despised too?

Jimmy drives off.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -DAY

Jimmy has the same look of anger, determination, and frustration. As he is driving, he takes a piece of candy out of his pocket, but as he looks out the window, he stops unrolling the candy. Images he sees are of the severe within the familiar.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS -CONTINUOUS

Images are of long rows of dirt recently hoed; the dead remains of a cotton crop; a slowly arching grade of scrubby pine forest that seems to go on forever. Some fields don't seem to have any purpose at all, just grass blowing. Nothingness.

People appear on the landscape, but they seem defeated. Black men are making their way to work a lifeless land, their wives carrying heavy loads beside them. Black children are walking to school when there should be a bus to pick them up. White men are caught in activities of routine that seem insurmountable: digging, cutting, working, continuing, as if they could never stop.

Framing it all, providing the MUSIC to this section, is a chain gang working on the roads and the CHANTS THEY SUNG while working. The racial mix of the chain gang is ninety-percent black. Jimmy catches the eye of one of the workers and focuses in, seeing that same expression of anger, frustration, and determination.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -CONTINUOUS.

Jimmy re-rolls the candy and places it back in his pocket.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS -CONTINUOUS

A filling station appears on the side of the road.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -CONTINUOUS

Jimmy looks at his gas gauge, which is near empty. He turns into the filling station and waits for the attendant.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION -DAY

Eventually, BOBBY, makes his way out of the station, smiling. There is something uneasy about his demeanor, despite his best efforts to hide it.

BOBBY:
Morning, Jimmy.

JIMMY:

Morning Bobby.

BOBBY:

Hadn't seen you in two weeks and day. Figured you'd be about out of gas by now. Figured I'd be seeing you just any time.

JIMMY:

I didn't want to get ahead of myself on credit, Bobby.

BOBBY:

Not so good at the business, is it?

JIMMY:

Not so good.

BOBBY:

Well, you know Jimmy, you could get a little behind, that'd be O.K. I wouldn't say nothing to nobody.

Pause. Both of them know that isn't true.

JIMMY:

How about you give me a quarter of tank, Bobby.

BOBBY:

Well, Jimmy, I'd love to pump that gas for ya, but fact is, I've been waiting on the gas truck myself 'bout two days, now. Ain't got a drop in that tank. If there was, I'd give it right to ya.

JIMMY:

(Skeptical)

That a fact?

BOBBY:

Well, now, I expect I should be getting some gas in later in the morning. I expect the truck should be in about then.

JIMMY:

Expect it will, do ya?

BOBBY:

You got a meeting there this morning, don't you Jimmy?

JIMMY:

Actually, I do, Bobby.

BOBBY:

Well, why don't you just go ahead and come by here after that meeting and we'll see what we can do. Should have a whole tank of gas by then. You got enough gas to get to work and back here, now, don't you Jimmy?

JIMMY:

I suppose I have that much.

BOBBY:

Well, then, just don't go nowhere's else and you're all right.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -DAY

Again, we see that look of frustration, anger, and determination as Jimmy starts his car and leaves Bobby behind in his rear view mirror, growing smaller.

CUT TO:

INT-PEANUT WAREHOUSE -DAY

Jimmy is busy working all aspects of the business, stacking, sorting, piling. There is a sense this business hasn't seen many customers in awhile, and it is because of this that Jimmy is working that much harder. Hence we have kind of an odd juxtaposition of effort to consequence, as Jimmy appears to be overwhelming all that he can control in a situation that he can't control.

BELL RINGS as the door opens. THREE MEN enter dressed in khakis and cotton shirts, clearly from the upper end of Plains.

ONE:

Well now, if this isn't the cleanest peanut warehouse in Plains.

TWO:

Hardest worker in Plains running it -ain't that right Jimmy?

ONE:

Just like his daddy -Mister Earl.

The name of Mr. Earl is meant to bait Jimmy.

ONE: (Cont.)

Yes sir, a boy should follow his daddy's example, sure enough. Ain't that right, Jimmy?

No reaction from Jimmy.

ONE: (Cont.)

Yes sir, this is one clean peanut warehouse.

THREE:

(Sincere, extending his hand)

Jimmy, we're sorry to bother you in the middle of your day. But if you got a minute, there's a few things we'd like to discuss with you.

JIMMY:

Have you boys come to buy peanuts? Because this is -as you've pointed out -a peanut warehouse.

ONE:

Well now, Jimmy, what use would we have for peanuts?

JIMMY:

Fertilizer, then? We stock a good brand of fertilizer -and seed.

TWO:

Jimmy, you know we don't have no use for fertilizer or seed.

JIMMY:

Well that's funny, because these days nobody else seems to have any use for anything we sell. Now why do you suppose that is?

THREE:

Jimmy, you know why we're here. But it's not like we're meaning to do you any harm. We're trying to help you out.

JIMMY:

Help me?

ONE: :

It wasn't us who went against you -it was you who turned around on us!

JIMMY:

And how did I do that?

Impatient, Two offers petition to Jimmy.

TWO:

This is a membership petition of the white mans' citizens council -that's us - and this petition says that we, the members of the white mans' citizens council, believe in the supremacy of the white race and are opposed to all the absolute horse shit coming outta the supreme court and Washington D.C. Now this membership petition is signed by every white man in Plains that is worth a damned, and nowhere on any of it do we find the name of "Jimmy Carter." Now why is that?

JIMMY:

Is that all?

THREE:

Now listen, Jimmy...

TWO:

Simple enough to me: The Bible tells us how to live, Bible tells us there are those who are put on earth to serve and those who are to lead. Read about Ham the woodcutter: saw his father naked, and that's what created the black race -the inferior black race.

THREE:

You've got to admit, Jimmy, all our lives the preachers have been telling us there was an order to things.

ONE:

Who you gonna listen to? Some Yankee judge up in Washington, or a preacher you've known all your life?

THREE:

It's not so much about the blacks as it is about people telling us what to do.

ONE:

Yankees 'll shoot off their mouth about anything has to do with the way we live. We can't just sit by and let folks do us that way.

TWO:

Hell, Jimmy, ain't we been getting along with the coloreds just fine without someone telling us what to do?

JIMMY:

You might want to ask the coloreds what they think.

ONE:

(Stepping up)

Now listen Jimmy: We all had a talk -three of us here- before we came over. Now we know that you and Rosalynn have been having a hard time of it since you been back -business not going as good as you mightta liked -and we understand that. So we decided we would all chip in and pay the membership dues for you. All you've got to do is just go ahead and sign on the line and we'll pay the five dollars ourselves.

JIMMY:

So you all decided that, did ya?

TWO:

Now you don't have to pay us back. This isn't a loan, it's just -well, an offering.

Jimmy takes a five dollar bill out of his wallet.

JIMMY:

But I've got the five dollars right here.

ONE:

Of course if you want to pay it yourself, that's even better.

THREE:

I told you he'd be offended.

TWO:

We didn't mean to offend you, now. We'll go ahead and take that money and you can just sign right here and pay your own way, just like everybody else.

JIMMY:

Just like everybody else.

Two offers him a pen.

TWO:

If it isn't everyone, the blacks will exploit that. Everyone includes you.

Jimmy takes the pen.

ONE:

See, I told ya -just like Mister Earl.

Jimmy bristles at the mention of his father's name in this context.

JIMMY:

I said I had five dollars. But, I kinda have a need for this particular five.

TWO:

What's that, Jimmy?

ONE:

Well, now, we said we could loan it to you.

THREE:

(Understands)

That isn't it.

Jimmy exits, opens the bathroom door and we hear a flushing sound.

THREE:

All right Jimmy. Can't say we didn't do all that we could. Let's go boys.

TWO:

You need to read your Bible's what you need to do, Jimmy Carter.

ONE:

I'm just glad Mr. Earl isn't here to see all of this, is all!

Jimmy runs out after them.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS -CONTINUOUS

JIMMY:

My daddy was a great man! Do you hear me? Do you hear me!

The men drive off. Jimmy stares in their direction, anger, frustration, determination.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR -DAY

Jimmy is driving down the road as a thunderstorm hits. Jimmy looks at his gas gauge and it registers empty. Driving fast, he abruptly pulls into the gas station.

He waits, but nobody comes. He blows his horn once, then again, and again. Finally, Bobby comes out holding a piece of cardboard over his head to shelter him from the rain.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAR -CONTINUOUS

BOBBY:

What in the hell...

JIMMY:

You got that gas yet, Bobby?

BOBBY:

No Jimmy, we ain't got no gas. We ain't got no gas
for you or your family.

Bobby stands in the rain and waits for a reply, but Jimmy just rolls up the window and angrily speeds off.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK ROAD -NIGHT

Jimmy's car has run out of gas. He slams the door and then opens the trunk. He makes no attempt to shield himself from the rain, which has become considerable. Jimmy then walks a country road in the middle of nowhere carrying a gas can.

A car drives up and Jimmy makes no attempt to wave it down. The car slows, then continues on.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARTER HOME -NIGHT

Rosalynn sees Jimmy approach and runs out to greet him.

ROSALYNN:

Oh my God, Jimmy, what happened?

JIMMY

I ran out of gas.

ROSALYNN:

Ran out of...

Beat. Rosalynn considers what really must have occurred.

ROSALYNN: (Cont.)

Oh, Jimmy, what is going to happen to us?

JIMMY:

In time, we'll both be glad. But tomorrow...

ROSALYNN:

Tomorrow, what?

JIMMY:

Tomorrow we're going to dig a big hole in the yard,
and install our own gas tank.

Screenplay continues.