

## RESOURCES OF THE CARTER LIBRARY IN THE STUDY OF RECENT GEORGIA HISTORY

David E. Alsobrook  
Jimmy Carter Library

(The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not those of the Jimmy Carter Library or of the National Archives and Records Administration)

On 28 January 1987, after six years of processing the Presidential papers of Jimmy Carter and his White House staff, we opened the Carter Library's research room to the public. Since that date, historians, political scientists, and curiosity-seekers have begun to examine the 6,000,000 pages of historical materials which are open for research. Most foreign-policy documents are security-classified and are closed; consequently, initial research has focused on domestic topics--Indian affairs, agricultural policy, the 1978 midterm congressional elections, White House relations with state and local officials, and various Presidential speeches.

Several researchers have looked at files dealing with President Carter's so-called "crisis of confidence" or "malaise" speech of 15 July 1979. Bob McMath, Professor of history at Georgia Institute of Technology, predicted that "Someone will do a good book on the malaise speech, what he was thinking, who he talked to, what he was reading that led to the speech."<sup>1</sup> Although a diligent scholar probably could produce a respectable paper on this speech, the definitive work must wait until the Presidential Speechwriters files, the Presidential Handwriting File, Hamilton Jordan's files, and other relevant materials are processed and open for research.

Two other historians assessed the potential impact of the opening of the Carter papers. Gary Fink of Georgia State University urged that the papers "will answer some broad questions of how decisions were made on appointments, energy policy and education," and Clayton State College's Brad Rice added that much will be revealed about Carter's "legislative relations and his relations with the press."<sup>2</sup>

These early assessments by Professors McMath, Fink, and Rice generally coincide with many other scholars' views of Presidential libraries' archival holdings. The Carter Library's collections, like those of the seven other Presidential libraries, primarily document the White House decision-making process for domestic and foreign

policy. Nevertheless, Presidential libraries also contain materials which are of vital interest to students of state and local history.<sup>3</sup>

This paper deals with some of the Carter Library's resources relating to recent Georgia history. The White House Central File, Subject File, includes several subject categories which deal solely with Georgia. For example, the subject category PL (Political Affairs) provides insight into the White House relationship with state and local officials and the Democratic Party hierarchy in Georgia. The PL file includes letters from Hamilton Jordan, Gerald Rafshoon, Jack Watson, and other White House aides to Georgia officials concerning elections, public rallies, and fund-raising activities. Also included are notes and other documents which give glimpses of President Carter's involvement in Georgia politics. In September 1980, he penned a handwritten note to a black political ally in Atlanta: "I'm particularly and personally interested in Dock Davis in the 6th Congressional District. Please join me in helping him."<sup>5</sup>

Another White House Central File, Subject File category, ST (States and Territories), includes a separate breakdown for each state. Georgia's file (ST 10) presents a detailed view of White House relations with Governor George Busbee, legislators, and other state officials, on a wide range of issues. From this file one can gain an overview of Busbee's concerns, ranging from his encouragement of Japanese and Colombian business investments in Georgia to his periodic requests for federal disaster aid.<sup>6</sup> Although Carter and Busbee apparently enjoyed a warm personal relationship, the Governor and the White House staff occasionally feuded over specific pieces of legislation, such as the Export Administration Act of 1979.<sup>7</sup>

The ST 10 file also contains some substantive materials on the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia in 1979-1980. In 1979, one Georgian, serving in Carter's Office of Management and Budget, sharply criticized the lobbying techniques of ERA advocates in the state:

1. The effort has been activist, young women (seen as former Hippie) against the reasonable motherly/grandmotherly type. In Georgia this hurts the effort.
2. The approach has always been now or never. There has been little consistent bridge building. The thrust



almost always appears to be confrontation oriented.

3. Except for a few members who sponsor the legislation, it has been an all female show.

4. There has [sic] been little obvious grassroots efforts at education of the populous [sic] or press in Georgia; particularly "out of Atlanta." A program along these lines could be useful in moderating or easing some of the opposition.<sup>8</sup>

Sarah Weddington, Assistant to the President for Women's Issues, including the ERA, expressed her disappointment in 1980 over the Amendment's death in the Georgia legislature, despite concerted White House efforts. Although she vowed to "continue to use the prestige of the office of the President" in behalf of the ERA,<sup>9</sup> she confided to the state ERA coordinator, "I guess we're just going to have a hard time in Georgia until we get certain people there not opposing the President so strongly."<sup>10</sup> The researcher can use these Subject File materials in conjunction with Sara Weddington's office files, which contain about 800 pages on the ERA campaign in Georgia.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to various Subject File categories, the White House Central File includes an extensive alphabetical "Name File" for individuals and organizations. Many of the Subject File cross-references will lead the researcher to the Name File folders for Governor Busbee, Mayor Maynard Jackson, and all of Georgia's U.S. senators and representatives. A typical Name File folder contains correspondence, memoranda, notes, and briefing materials. The Name File for Senator Sam Nunn is quite voluminous--approximately 800 pages or 6 linear inches. Nunn's file includes a mixture of routine constituent letters referred to the White House, requests for White House tours and autographed photographs of the President, recommendations for federal jobs, and substantive correspondence and memoranda on domestic and foreign policy issues. As revealed by his file's contents, Nunn played a key leadership role in some of the most important foreign policy matters of the Carter Administration--Salt II, aircraft sales to the Middle East, defense spending, and the Panama Canal Treaties.<sup>12</sup> On several occasions, President Carter personally thanked Nunn (usually in handwritten notes) for supporting the Administration on key votes. For example, in March 1978, after Senate approval of the treaty allowing the U.S.

to defend the Panama Canal's neutrality after the year 2000, Carter wrote to Nunn: "I know this was a very difficult vote for you this year. You have my admiration."<sup>13</sup>

Memoranda in Nunn's file clearly reveal the respect accorded him by the White House staff. In July 1979, a National Security Council official asserted: "As we said several months ago, Sam Nunn is going to be crucial to the passage of SALT. Within 24 hours, he managed to switch the debate from one which focused on verification, protocol, and heavy missiles to one about overall defense posture."<sup>14</sup> Also during the SALT II debate in 1979, White House advisers reminded the President that his upcoming meeting with Nunn was primarily "to discuss Soviet/SALT policies rather than the substance of the Treaty. . . . [H]e understands the substance better than any other Senator . . . ,[and] [h]e may be one of the only Senators who can effectively counter [Henry] Jackson." In the autumn of 1979, after Congressional Liaison Chief Frank Moore reported that the Senator was concerned about the effectiveness of the U.S. volunteer Army and conventional military forces, the President quickly responded, "Frank--I need a private meeting with Nunn."<sup>16</sup>

As exemplified by Nunn's materials, the Name File is a valuable resource for the biographer or researcher who is interested in specific aspects of the careers of public officials. The Name File also can provide clues for research in other archival depositories. A word of caution to the researcher may be in order--The Name File is full of cryptic notes and cross-references to other files. Therefore, in utilizing the Name File, the researcher must be patient in following the "paper trail" of documents.

After sampling some of the materials in White House Central File, it may be worthwhile to examine a specific research topic within the context of the sources which are open. In mid-September 1980, during his re-election campaign, President Carter delivered several speeches on a swing through Atlanta. His address to 300 Southern black leaders at Ebenezer Baptist Church on September 1980 proved to be one of the most decisive media events of the campaign. Carter's campaign staff advised him to use the speech "to motivate those [black leaders] who support us, bring around those who are wavering, and outline how important their help will be in the upcoming election."<sup>17</sup>

Carter attempted to follow this advice in his speech. In his



opening remarks, he clearly established his theme--since the end of segregation, blacks had made significant political, economic, and social gains, and he was one of the white leaders of the "New South" of the 1970s whom blacks had entrusted with their votes. If re-elected, he promised to continue his efforts in their behalf. After paying tribute to Martin Luther King, Sr., and his son, Carter told the gathering that he owed his election in 1976 to black voters like themselves; "[H]ad it not been for the people in this audience--I started to say congregation--I would not be President." Perhaps to the surprise of his speechwriters and political advisers, the President then referred to his famous "ethnic purity" remark of 1976 and how his black supporters "healed the wound I had done to myself."<sup>18</sup>

Carter also sought to contrast his racial sensitivity with Ronald Reagan's alleged insensitivity: "You've seen in this campaign the stirrings of hate and rebirth of code words like 'states rights' in a speech in Mississippi, in a campaign reference to the Ku Klux Klan, relating to the South. That is a message that creates a cloud on the political horizon. Hatred has no place in this country. Racism has no place in this country."<sup>19</sup>

Although the group in the church and other black leaders praised the President's remarks, the national press corps condemned him as "mean-spirited." After a barrage of negative press directed at this speech and other Carter addresses in September, the President and his staff tried in vain to mend their fences with the media.<sup>20</sup>

The researcher who wishes to trace the evolution of this speech will experience some frustration, primarily because the Presidential Speechwriters files and the Presidential Handwriting File have not been processed. Early drafts of this speech can be found in the files of some of Carter's senior advisers, such as Press Secretary Jody Powell. A 12 September 1980 draft, located in Powell's files, includes none of the quotations I have cited previously in this paper.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps his advisers or Carter himself made some of the changes in this speech after 12 September. His common practice of re-writing entire speeches supports this theory. The possibility also exists that he simply departed from his prepared text during delivery. These questions cannot be answered adequately until the relevant resources are available to the researcher. In the meantime, the researcher must rely on the President's Daily Diary,

scattered speech drafts in staff files, and the published *Papers of President Carter*.

The Carter Library also has an extensive collection of Presidential materials which are unprocessed and will not be open for a number of years. These files, which total about 700 linear feet, include Carter's personal correspondence, records and memorabilia of all his political campaigns, his U.S. Navy records, records of his service in the state senate, and Carter Family papers. Future Carter biographers will rely heavily on these rich sources when they are open for research.

For the present, the researcher will find some interesting items on recent Georgia history in the Library's archival collections. Our resources for Georgia history never will replace those of state and local archival depositories, but they provide a supplement for many traditional sources. Our archival staff will be happy to assist Georgia members and other Georgia historians in utilizing our collections. If you have a research topic in mind, we suggest you contact us before you plan a trip to the Library.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1987.

<sup>2</sup>*New York Times*, 29 January 1987.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Martin I. Elzy, "LBJ Library: Local History Resources Found Nowhere Else," *History News* 35: 2 (February 1980): 9-11; Elzy, "Illinois viewed from the Johnson White House," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 74: 1 (Spring 1981): 3-4; Thomas Branigar, "Eisenhower Library Resources for State and Local History," paper presented at the American Association for State and Local History's Annual Meeting, 12 September 1980, Topeka, Kansas; David E. Alsobrook, "Resources for Recent Alabama History in the Carter Presidential Library: A Preliminary Survey," paper presented at the Alabama Historical Association's Annual Meeting, 25 April 1986, Mobile, Alabama.

<sup>4</sup>See letters, Gerald M. Rafshoon to Shirley Harris, 1 June 1977; Hamilton Jordan to T. Allen Childs, Jr., 28 April, 11 May 1977, 2 May 1978; Jordan to Franklin S. Horne, Jr., 18 July 1977; Jack E. Watson to Dean Rusk, 12 October 1977, White House Central File.



Subject File, PL/ST 10, Box PL-5, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is hereafter cited as WHCF-Subject File.

<sup>5</sup>Letter, President Carter to Jesse Hill, 11 September 1980, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Memos, Gene Eidenberg to Phil Wise, 4 April 1980; Stu Eizenstat and Lynn Daft to President Carter, 10 March, 18 April, 26 May 1977; Jack H. Watson to Carter, 5 April 1977; Mike Hornblow to Tim Kraft, 15 March 1977; letters, Watson to Governor George Busbee, 19 April 1978; Busbee to Richard A. Pettigrew, 5 December 1977; Busbee to Carter, 14 March 1977; Carter to Busbee, 27 September 1977; Annie M. Gutierrez to Busbee, 11 July 1977; telegram, Carter to Busbee, 7 November 1977, WHCF-Subject File, ST 10, Boxes ST-7 through St-8.

<sup>7</sup>Letters, Carter to Busbee, 6 June 1977; 20 April 1979; 11 November 1980; Busbee to Carter, 8 December 1977; memos, William E. Odom to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 7 May 1979; Eizenstat and Eidenberg to Carter, 30 April 1979; Eizenstat and Ralph Schlosstein to Carter, 7 February 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Memo, Hubert L. Harris to Sarah C. Weddington, 17 January 1979, Box St-8, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Letter, Weddington to Sandra Skorniak, 14 April 1980, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Letter, Weddington to Dorothy Tracy, 28 February 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>See three folders, "ERA-Georgia," Boxes 30-31, Sarah Weddington Files, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example. letters, Sam Nunn to Carter, 21 June 1979; Frank Moore to Nunn, 8 September 1979; Douglas J. Bennet, Jr., to Nunn, 1 June 1979; Nunn to Harold Brown, 31 July 1978; Brzezinski to Nunn, 17 November 1977, 3 May 1978; Carroll Blankenship to Nunn, 4 April 1978; memo, Dan Tate to Frank Moore, 4 February 1978, "Nunn, Sen. Sam," Box 2456, WHCF-Name File, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Letter, Carter to Nunn, 22 March 1978, "Nunn, Sen. Sam," "Presidential Only," Box 2457, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Memo, Madeleine Albright to Brzezinski, 30 July 1979, "Nunn, Sen. Sam," Box 2456, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Briefing Paper, Moore and Brzezinski, n.d., ca. 23 January 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Memo, Moore to Carter, 12 September 1979, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Briefing Paper, n.d., ca. 14 September 1980, President's Daily Diary, "9/16/80, Backup Material," Box PD-90, Presidential Diary Office, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>18</sup>Remarks at a Meeting with Southern Black Leaders,

<sup>18</sup>"Remarks at a Meeting with Southern Black Leaders, September 16, 1980, Atlanta," *Public Papers of the President: Jimmy Carter, 1980-81* (3 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1982), 2: 1750.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 2: 1753.

<sup>20</sup>For an incisive treatment of press reaction to Carter's speeches in September 1980, see Theodore H. White, *America: Search of Itself; The Making of the President, 1965-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 389-390.

<sup>21</sup>Memo (with attached speech draft), Al McDonald, Ed Hertzberg, and Achsah Nesmith to Carter, 12 September 1980. "Presidential Speeches, 9/12/80-9/16/80, [CF, O/A 744]," Box 1, Jody Powell's Files, Jimmy Carter Library.