

## “An Attitude of Piety”

**Date:** November 29, 1982

**Participant:** Jimmy Carter

**Participant Title:** 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

SCROLLER TITLE: “An Attitude of Piety”

SCENE SETTER: As the first Democrat to assume the Oval Office since the Watergate scandal, President Jimmy Carter described his efforts to reassure the American people about his administration’s honesty and morality. Carter also reflected on the importance of following through on campaign promises—both popular and unpopular—that he believed were right.

**President Carter:** I had adopted, I’ll use the word pious again, I think an attitude of piety that aggravated some people, but also was the root of my political success in 1976. People wanted someone who wasn’t going to tell another lie, who was not going to mislead the public and who was going to try to reestablish, in my judgment, ethics and morality in international affairs. That’s what I offered, and that’s what I tried to carry out. I was obsessed, maybe to excess, with the need to carry out all my campaign promises. We kept a record of every campaign promise that I made. We even published it, as you know. [Stuart] Stu Eizenstat was the one who evolved our campaign policy and he kept a record of everything I promised and when we’d been in office a few weeks, we published the darn thing, which was probably naive in a way, but it was restraining on me. I would go over with Stu Eizenstat or with Jack Watson, [Hamilton] Ham [Jordan] every now and then, a list of the things that we had promised and when we thought we could fit them into our agenda to get them accomplished.

*End of excerpt 1.*

**President Carter:** And we were in a different time. The press was inquisitive, there was this sense of distrust, and confidence in government was shaken. I felt a particular need to reassure people that we were honest and benevolent and moral. The human rights policy was one way to epitomize this new attitude. I’m not claiming that all those attributes were well-advised or right, but that’s the way we looked at our responsibilities. And we tried never to deviate from it. A lot of my advisors, including Rosalynn, used to argue with me about my decision to move ahead with a project when it was obviously not going to be politically advantageous, or to encourage me to postpone it until a possible second term and so forth. It was just contrary to my nature. I felt like I was . . . I just couldn’t do it.

*End of excerpt 2.*

CITATION: Interview with President Carter, November 29, 1982, Jimmy Carter Presidential Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/jimmy-carter-oral-history>