Thirteen

Show #703

WNET/Thirteen: 356 West 58th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019
Transcripts: Bill Moyers' Journal Campaign Report, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101
Press contact: Sara Reitz (212) 560-2039

BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL

The Carter Years: One Man's Perspective

Executive Producer ..... JOAN KONNER
Executive Editor ..... BILL MOYERS
Producer ..... RANDY BEAN

This program is made possible by a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

WNET/Thirteen PBS Air Date: November 21, 1980

TRANSCRIPT CHARGES:
One to ten copies, $2.00 each; additional copies, $1.00 each. Be sure to indicate air date and subject or participants. Send order with payment to Bill Moyers' Journal, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101. All orders must be prepaid. Make checks payable to Bill Moyers' Journal. PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH OR STAMPS.

CANADIAN VIEWERS: Canadian checks are not acceptable due to excessive bank clearance charges. Please send U.S. funds. Thank you.

The Carter Years: One Man's Perspective

[Tease — Interior, the White House]

HAMILTON JORDAN: I think that will be the hallmark of the Carter years, that President Carter came to Washington at a difficult time in the history of our country. And that he tackled the problems both domestically and in foreign policy that had been sidestepped or ignored or only partially dealt with by previous administrations. We were not always successful. But we have engaged those problems and I viewed the second term as a time for consolidation. And I hope that President-elect Reagan, once he's in the Oval Office and feels the enormous responsibility of 225 million people looking to him for leadership, I hope that he will put aside for just awhile all of the campaign rhetoric and the campaign promises and think hard about what's in the best interest of our country.

BILL MOYERS *[voice-over]*: Tonight, from the west wing of the White House, an interview with presidential advisor Hamilton Jordan. I'm Bill Moyers.

[Bill Moyers' Journal opening]

MOYERS: For eight years, ever since he drew the road map for Jimmy Carter's trip to the White House, Hamilton Jordan has been deeply immersed in presidential politics. For the last four years, as presidential confidante and White House chief of staff, he has been one of the most powerful and controversial men in Washington. Now he's going home to Georgia to teach and write at Emory University. And right now, he has agreed to talk about the Carter years — one man's perspective. You know the president better than anyone except Rosalyn and perhaps Jody Powell. How is he taking this defeat?

JORDAN: Well, he is by nature a very competitive person and, as you can imagine, an incumbent president seeking re-election would like to have a victory and the approbation of the American people. But I think he is philosophical about his defeat, reflective about the four years that he has spent in the White House, proud of the record of this administration. And I think he will go home at peace with himself and serene and proud of the time he has been here.

MOYERS: Peace and serenity. The story is that after he lost that first race for governor of Georgia — back in— when was it, 1966? — he suffered depression and that's when he had a profound religious experience. Nothing like that, now?

JORDAN: Well, the Jimmy Carter that I knew then is not different in the sense that he was very competitive. I think at that point in time in his life, he had never failed — had never been defeated. And I think he took, ironically, his defeat in 1966 for governor of Georgia much worse than he's taking his defeat as president. It's easier to understand why an incumbent president, facing the great and complex problems that face our country, would not be re-elected. So I think he is comfortable with himself and, as I said, at peace with himself.

MOYERS: He doesn't take this as a personal defeat, a personal rejection?

JORDAN: No, I don't think so. It is a difficult job being president of this country. He came to Washington not to be a popular president but to try to be a successful president. Measured against that hope, I think he has been successful. He has engaged the great problems that face this country both domestically and in foreign policy. We have not always been successful. Our approach has certainly not always been correct. But if you look at the array of problems that faced this country in 1976 when we arrived in Washington, I think you can say almost without exception that we tackled those problems. I think that will be the hallmark of the Carter years. And the regret about not being re-elected is a regret of not having four more years to consolidate some of the gains that we had made both in domestic and foreign policy.

MOYERS: Obviously, you think better of the record than the people who voted on it the other day.

JORDAN: I think it's the best-kept secret in the country.

MOYERS: How do you account for that — what many people call a landslide victory for Reagan — if those policies were as sound as you believe them to be.

JORDAN: It is very difficult today to be a mayor or a governor or a president and to be successful and to also be popular. That has something to do or to say about our political system.

MOYERS: What do you mean?

JORDAN: Well, in what's happened to our system in the last fifteen or twenty years. Political power in this country is fragmented. I won't make a value judgment on that but it's a fact. Twenty years ago, for example, a president that wanted to pass a tax bill would have called Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn and George Meany together and they would have sat down in the Oval Office and agreed on a tax bill and it would have sailed through the Congress. Political power since that time has fragmented. We've had very effective partisan leadership in the Congress. You can have the president, the partisan leadership and the committee chairs supporting a piece of legislation, and it can get defeated in subcommittee by a group of young turks who have come to the Congress in the last four to six years. So, political power in this country is fragmented. Another problem is that we face a whole new generation of problems that are more difficult and more subtle than I think at any other time in our country's history.

MOYERS: Example.

JORDAN: Well, they are— let me draw a contrast with, say, the problems we faced in the '40s and '50s. It was very easy to rally the American people against the threat of, say, Nazi Germany. Today, the problems that a president must face are the relationship, for example, of unemployment, inflation, to our country's excessive dependence on foreign oil sources, to its impact on the dollar on the world market. It relates to the situation in the Middle East and the desire to find peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors. That's the nature of the complex problems that face a president.

MOYERS: I was out on the campaign trail and I kept running into people who said they were weary with Jimmy Carter telling them that these problems couldn't be solved, that nothing could be done. And that they were going to vote for Reagan even though they were not Republicans because they felt at least he was optimistic, that he still believed that we could take destiny in our hands and change our circumstances and defeat these problems. Did you get any of that during the campaign? And why do you think Jimmy Carter kept emphasizing the negative?

JORDAN: I don't think the president ever emphasized the negative. I think the president's message to the American people throughout the four years that he was here, was a message based on reality. I'm not sure that we communicated— we either failed to communicate the description of these problems and our solutions for those problems to the American people. Or the American people did not want to hear what we had to say because we were saying basically things that were unpleasant. We were saying that we were excessively dependent on foreign oil sources. We're going to have to conserve. We're going to have to learn to produce more energy in this country. We're going to have to pay more for our gasoline. So, I can— in a detached way, I think I could stand back and say that any president that had served from 1976 to 1980, given the unexpected and unanticipated international events and political change that took place in this country, I think any president probably would have had some difficulty getting re-elected.

MOYERS: You said something a few years ago that I wrote down at the time. You said to members of the Democratic National Committee, "After one term as governor of Georgia, Jimmy couldn't have been re-elected. Maybe he'll wind up that way in 1980." What part of Jimmy Carter's character were you revealing?

JORDAN: Well, I think it was a realization on my part, at that time, that his approach to the presidency would be similar to the approach he had taken to the governorship.

MOYERS: Which was?

JORDAN: Well, he came into the governorship and tackled the tough issues, alienated some of the political leaders, alienated some of the bureaucrats, some of the people that had the vested interest in the status quo. And at the end of his four years as governor of Georgia, he would have had great difficulty in being re-elected. He took, I think, that same courageous approach to the problems that face the country and have faced the country for the last four years. But I think he was trapped to a greater extent than anyone could have ever predicted in the cross-currents of international events and political change that we faced the last four years.

MOYERS: You get a sense of a man who came to office convinced he could manage these events, and then deeply frustrated because he discovered he couldn't.

JORDAN: Well, Bill, there're so many things that happened in the last four years — and, again, I say this not to— I hate to sound whining or making excuses — there are so many things that happened in the last four years that would not have been anticipated by anyone.

MOYERS: You didn't know about these things? I mean, you had no idea?

JORDAN: We did not know when we came into office that the price of oil on the world market — which was nine or

ten dollars in 1976 — would be $35 on Election Day, and the great strain that that has put on our economy for the past three and a half years. We had no way of anticipating three and a half or four years ago that the Soviet Union would invade Afghanistan or that the Shah of Iran would fall and that a pro-Western government would be replaced by an anti-Western government that condoned the seizure and holding of American hostages. So, these are the events that faced this president the past four years. And it would be my prediction that events of this magnitude are the type that any president will face for the next 15 or 20 years as we grapple with some of these problems that are bigger than any one president.

MOYERS: But surely you all knew all of those years from '72 on, that you weren't running for president of the Plains Rotary Club.

JORDAN: No, we knew we were running for president of the country. I think the president— President-elect Carter came to Washington with a sense of purpose both in domestic and in foreign policy. I think if you measure his campaign promises from the '76 campaign against what he has accomplished, I think it is a good and a solid record. But there were some things, obviously— or many things, obviously, that we did not know and did not anticipate — and is beyond the ability of any president to know and anticipate.

MOYERS: What have you learned about Washington? When I was a young man here, one of the wise old figures around Franklin Roosevelt took me aside and he said, "I want to tell you a story," he said. "It's about the lion and the missionary. The missionary came to tame the lions. But one of the lions wouldn't be tamed and started chasing the missionary. And the missionary started praying on the run, 'Oh, Lord, please let that lion get religion. Please let that lion get religion.' And just as the missionary got trapped, he turned around to face the lion and he saw a celestial light fall upon the lion. He saw the most benign, heavenly look come across the lion's face. And he heard the lion as he lifted his paws in pious prayer say, 'Oh, Lord, for this nourishment we are about to receive—' " And the question— the point is that the wise old man of Washington said, he said, "Moyers, sooner or later the lions get religion, but they still have their way." Now that's Washington. What have you learned about Washington?

JORDAN: I don't even remember the light falling on the lion— the heavenly light falling on the lion that's been chasing us the past four years. It's an interesting city. Probably some of the most interesting people in the world reside here.

MOYERS: Now, that's not a very revealing answer. "Interesting." What's interesting? What do you mean?

JORDAN: But it is also a very cautious city. Political compromise is very important here. Political procrastination is important here. And if you look at the very difficult problems that face our country over the next 15 to 20 years, they cannot be solved by caution. They cannot be solved incrementally through compromise. And they can not be procrastinated. A president has got to look at these problems and make some hard choices. I think one of the— we ran in '76 and were properly tagged as "the outsiders". It would have been an advantage to President Carter to have had federal experience. But I think it was even a greater advantage to come to Washington absent a conventional attitude and approach to the problems that face our country.

MOYERS *[incredulous]*: You do?

JORDAN: If you look at the accomplishments of this administration, they're particularly dramatic in foreign policy. If you had asked these wise people in Washington, "Should we have normalized relations with the People's Republic of China in the first term," you would have had, I think, almost a unanimous response, "That's something you do in your second term." And if you had asked people in Washington, "Do you bring President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin up to Camp David for a summit with very little hope of a success," they would have said "no." Three or four months later, when that Camp David peace treaty was about to fall apart, if you'd asked that same group of people, "Should the president dash off to Egypt and Israel to try to save that peace agreement between Israel and Egypt — should he do that or not," the answer would have been, "no." So, I think one of the greatest things that President Carter brought to Washington and to the White House was a willingness to be bold, to go against the grain, and not take a conventional approach to our nation's problems.

MOYERS: But look where it has led.

JORDAN: But there were political costs to all those things. And if you look— if I named for you the five or eight major accomplishments of this administration — in domestic policy, our energy legislation, our windfall profits tax, the creation of a Synfuels Corporation; in foreign policy, the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David process, normalization of our relationship with China — none of those things were politically popular.

MOYERS: How do you feel about the way Washington has treated you personally — and I know some of these

things are difficult to talk about but there was that famous article by Sally Quinn in the *Washington Post* early in the administration when she referred to your then wife Nancy as "pretty, but not really beautiful." And she referred to you as looking like a high school football player on a class field trip to Washington." What was your reaction to such things and did you think that official conventional Washington was out to get you?

JORDAN: Well, two things happened. I came here— I came to Washington from the campaign with a high public profile. There was a curiosity about the new president-elect and the people around him. I didn't have a sense of how great an interest the media would have in the people that were around the new president. And in that sense possibly I failed in my public responsibility. I doubt if anybody in the country has ever read anything about the work I've done in the White House. It has always been about things that I allegedly did that were either completely untrue or greatly exaggerated, but I became a very vulnerable target for the gossip columnist. But when I look— when I stand back and look at my four years in Washington, I consider myself one of the luckiest people in the world to have been able to have worked in the White House, to work for a man who was a president that I think did a great job in dealing with this country's problems. and so I have no ill will or animosity or bitterness toward Washington or my experience here.

MOYERS: What have you learned about the press in this city?

JORDAN: Ah, it's tough. It's a very tough press. Some would say vicious. I think an aggressive, skeptical, questioning press has always been and will always be in the interest of the American people and our country. Grown, I think, largely out of our experiences in Vietnam and Watergate, I think that skepticism in some instances has grown into a cynicism that's unwarranted toward politicians and toward the political process. And it makes it, you know, all the more difficult to govern effectively.

MOYERS: Is this in any way why about a year and a half ago you sort of went underground or went out of sight? Because for two and a half years, you'd been highly visible and at the center of—

JORDAN: It was never my intention when I came here to be a public figure. And the last thing I would have ever imagined — or certainly not desired — was to have been a target of controversy.

MOYERS: And yet there was that picture of you posing with Jody Powell like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid—

JORDAN: That's one of—

MOYERS: That's voluntary—

JORDAN: Well, that's voluntary abuse. That was one of those things I wish that we hadn't done. But no, after— I reached a point in time where I realized that to the extent that I was— received publicity and was controversial, that it undermined my ability to help the president. And then a couple of years ago, a couple of convicted felons accused me of using cocaine — which was not true — and I decided at that point—

MOYERS: You defended those charges successfully, I might say. But what impressions—

JORDAN: Yes. A year later and many thousand dollars later, I was obviously exonerated but—

MOYERS: Are you in debt because of that?

JORDAN: Yes. But that's not— it's not a major problem. But my point was that I reached a point in time where I decided that I basically would just not grant press interviews and I've led a very quiet life.

MOYERS: A chaste life?

JORDAN: No. I have my friends and I've enjoyed myself, but I basically just don't go out in public or haven't for the last couple of years.

MOYERS: In a fine piece written about you — I thought a perceptive piece written about you — in the *Washington Monthly*, Nicholas Lemann wrote, "In the same way the friends of Hamilton Jordan are amazed now at the difference between the Jordan they know and the Jordan they read about in the papers. The Jordan they read about looks down women's dresses at fancy parties, gets into nasty scenes at bars, won't return phone calls or answer letters and regularly alienates and offends people in Washington. The Jordan they know is not just warm and friendly but unusually and remarkably so. Cordial, gracious, unaffected — a man who regularly goes out of his way just to be nice to people." Now, how do you explain to yourself, and to your mother, that contradiction in perceptions?

JORDAN: Well, it's— again, it's— it was manifested by the fact that I came here with this— with a high public profile which I did not desire. And I think maybe to some people in the press, I epitomized in one person all of the

concerns that people had about the Carter administration. I was from Georgia; I was close to the president; I didn't socialize here in Washington. And I think out of all of that grew this vulnerability and the tendency for people in the press to write about me. But I never let it bother me. I never let it interfere with my work. I did not come to Washington either to be a public figure or to be a social figure.

MOYERS: Should White House assistants have what used to be called "a passion for anonymity"?

JORDAN: The best piece of advice that I think I probably ever received was from Richard Cheney, who is now a congressman — a very fine human being who was chief of staff under President Ford — and he told me that the one thing that I should do would be to keep my head low. I don't know if I ever had that option because by the time that I arrived here, both Jody Powell and myself were the objects of curiosity and publicity. But yes, a lot of public attention — and certainly public controversy, which was my own case — detracts from your ability to do your work.

MOYERS: Let's talk about this most recent campaign in some particulars and then some generalities. Didn't the president hurt himself when he came out swinging against Reagan as a warmonger? Didn't that go against the image of Jimmy Carter as a decent and compassionate man?

JORDAN: Yes, I think sometimes in the heat of a campaign, and to try to define the very significant differences that existed between Governor Reagan and President Carter — particularly on the issue of nuclear arms control — it probably did seem strident or shrill or uncharacteristic. But again, it was— there were things said by Governor Reagan and by President Carter during the campaign that I'm sure both of them regret. But the purpose of the general election was for the American people to get a look at these two men and the differences. And I always felt during the cam— during that general election and now that it's over, I felt that here you had a national election with two men who had very different views of the world and of the problems that face the America people and our political system. And those differences were lost during the campaign for some reason.

MOYERS: Why do you think they were?

JORDAN: I'm not sure. But if you look at Governor Reagan's philosophy and approach to our energy problem, to our economic problems, particularly to the problem of arms control, and you look at President Carter's record and his positions on those same critical issues, you have vast differences — differences in approach, differences in philosophy. And those were never the focus of the general election campaign. Again, I'm not— Governor Reagan has won a good, solid victory and not to take anything away from him. But I think we would have done much better and might have won if the election had been decided on those issues and on those differences.

MOYERS: But then he became the more successful campaigner.

JORDAN: Governor Reagan is a— I think, has demonstrated throughout his political career an amazing ability to communicate. And I think that will serve him well in the Oval Office. Because we are certainly at a point in time in the history of our country when a president needs to be able to communicate to the American people a sense of the problems that we face, a sense of the hard choices and sacrifices that have to be made. So he certainly proved himself to be a good communicator and a good campaigner.

MOYERS: It must be hard for you to face the reality that he turned the campaign into a referendum on Jimmy Carter's record and that most people that I've talked to since the election are beginning to question whether it was a swing to the right as much as it was a repudiation of the four years of the Carter administration.

JORDAN: It's a simplification to say it was a repudiation of President Carter or a swing to the right, although there are people in this country that have been dissatisfied with our stewardship over the past four years and there are— I think there is a trend, a more conservative trend in the country. But I think it was a— I think that the things that defeated us were larger than the campaign itself. Again, I go back to our economic problems — largely a result of OPEC price increases — and the Iranian hostage situation, which came to symbolize, I think, the frustrations that the American people have about not being able to have greater control over their lives and their destiny.

MOYERS: Every time we get into this area of discussion, you bring up how disorderly the world is and how events are moving in upon us and how helpless the country appears to be and how little there is a president can do about them. And the image that comes across — as it did, in fact, of the administration for the last two and a half years — is that of men saying, "The world's too disorderly. The world— events are [out of] control. There's nothing we can do about them." Isn't the president elected to try to do something about them? Isn't he supposed to seize those events by the nape of the neck and say, "We're not going to let events get us down!"?

JORDAN: A modern-day president can shape events, can influence events, can very seldom control events. I would say in absolute terms our country has less power and influence in the world than it had, say, 30 years ago. I would

also say, though, in relative terms, our country has as much power and influence today as we had 30 years ago. The fact is the world has changed dramatically in the last 20 or 30 years and this feeling of helplessness does not take into account this change.

MOYERS: Didn't the message get through here to you — to you all — that people do not want to be told that we're helpless; people do not want to be told that it's our fault; people do not want to be told that there is really nothing that can be done about it?

JORDAN: I don't think we ever— we never intended for that to be our message and I don't think—

MOYERS: But I mean the message from the people to you all. That was what we journalists were hearing out there.

JORDAN: Well, and I think— and I think our response to that was, you know— I think our response to that, not only in the campaign but in the last four years, is, "You know, we have a future; we have a great future. But we've got to make some hard choices and we've got to make some sacrifice." And that we have ignored for the last 10 or 15 years some of these problems. I think that will be the hallmark of the Carter years — that President Carter came to Washington at a difficult time in the history of our country, and that he tackled the problems both domestically and in foreign policy that had been sidestepped or ignored or only partially dealt with by previous administrations. We were not always successful but we have engaged those problems and I viewed the second term as a time for consolidation. And I hope that President-elect Reagan, once he's in the Oval Office and feels the enormous responsibility of 225 million people looking to him for leadership, I hope that he will put aside for just awhile all of the campaign rhetoric and the campaign promises and think hard about what's in the best interest of our country. I know that in 1976, Governor Carter never made a campaign promise that he intended to break. And I know Governor Reagan did not make campaign promises in 1980 that he intended to break. But he would be well served and the country would be well served if he would — at least for a brief period of time — take a fresh look from the perspective of a president, at the great problems and challenges that face our country.

MOYERS: Isn't it the task of leadership to persuade people to do — if not happily, at least cheerfully — what they don't want to do? Isn't that what leadership is about — to convince people to do the necessary?

JORDAN: That's— in an ideal world that's, I think, maybe a good description of leadership. But when you're telling people that their gasoline is going to have to cost $1.50 instead of 70 or 85 cents, you're not going to get a happy response. You might get a begrudging response. Yes, that's the test of leadership. And possibly in that sense of communicating — of describing the problem, in describing the solution — possibly that's where we failed. But again, I'm not sure if it's— I'm not sure if it's that we failed to communicate or if the American people did not hear or did not listen or did not want to hear what we were saying to them.

MOYERS: Did you get the message that we were getting out there, that a lot of people felt that Jimmy Carter was incompetent? The word he had used against Gerry Ford in 1976, competence, became a word used regularly against him in 1980.

JORDAN: To those of us that have known President Carter and have worked with him for a number of years — and I think this would apply to people in Washington that learned to know him as president and people on the Hill that learned to know him — the two words that I have heard used to describe him that are most ironic and, I think, inaccurate in every sense of the word, are "incompetent" and "politically ambitious". If you look at the record of the past four years, he did all those things that were politically controversial and ultimately costly. In terms of competence, if you looked at our legislative record of accomplishment, our record of accomplishment in foreign policy, it is a solid record of achievement. It is something that I will never understand that he is perceived by some people has being incompetent.

MOYERS: But you know that is the perception out there? That that message managed to seep through?

JORDAN: Yes.

MOYERS: I don't mean to be rude, it's just that—

JORDAN: No, Bill, I acknowledge that as a perception that's out there, and a very unfair perception if— again, if you look in a detached way at the problems we faced and the successes that we had. I think it's— there's also a tendency, I think, now — this relates to the role of the press in our system of government — and that is an inclination for the media to focus oftentimes more on the process than on the substance. For example, I'm sure you remember — I do — in 1978 when the president made his changes in the Cabinet.

MOYERS: Oh yes. That was one of the most controversial moments in the administration.

JORDAN: The substance was that the president decided to improve the coordination between himself and the White House staff and the Cabinet. And he also made a decision to change a number of Cabinet officers. That was the substance of the Camp David domestic summit that he had that summer. But all of the press stories were focused and preoccupied with the process: the fact that all the Cabinet members volunteered to resign. Again, there's a tendency to focus excessively on the process and the color and the conflict and not enough on the substance.

MOYERS: That was an extraordinary moment in the history of this administration. He had taken many members of the establishment, members of the Cabinet, members of the press, bankers and others, up to Camp David to figure out how to pick himself and the country up and go forward. And he came down from that mountain experience and told the nation that our troubles were due to a loss of confidence in ourselves and our future. And then he followed that with what you referred to — that change in many Cabinet positions that seemed to destroy the sense of composure and confidence that he had spent that weekend doing. Now—

JORDAN: You just illustrated the point I was trying to make. The point of what he did was to say to himself and to the American people, "I'm not satisfied with the way things are; and I'm not satisfied that I have the best men and women to assist me in running the government and leading the country. So I'm gonna make these changes." That was the result of what was done.

MOYERS: Well, I remember that so vividly. And I acknowledge that process and effects and policy get all mixed up in my business, but I remember the president saying, you know, there's a crisis in the American spirit, a malaise in America. And then he changed the Cabinet. Wouldn't he have been better to say, "There are problems. And I don't have the right people helping me solve these problems. It's my responsibility to solve them. Nothing wrong with you people except what leadership can fix. And, by George, I'm gonna change my Cabinet and we're coming at this again. And this time we're gonna solve the problems." That's Monday morning quarterbacking. but—

JORDAN: Well, it is, but I don't think his message was that different from what you've said, with the exception that he said to the American people — accurately — that there are hard choices to be made and there are sacrifices that you and I are going to have to make if this country is going to continue to be great economically, politically and militarily. And so much of our problem that was addressed at that time at Camp David was energy. And we came out of that Camp David summit, frankly, with some new additions to the Cabinet that I think without exception strengthened the president's hand in managing the government. We came out of that domestic summit with new energy legislation — the windfall profits tax, the legislation that created the Synfuels Corporation, which is the largest peacetime effort in the history of our country. So substantive things followed. But your memory and the memory of most of the American people is of the process by which he chose to change the Cabinet members. So certainly if we had to do it over again, we'd do it differently. Because that was not the impression that was desired; the impression that was desired was a president facing up to some shortcomings in his own administration, addressing those shortcomings and saying to the American people, "You know, we can whip these problems that face us, but we can only whip them if we make these hard choices and if you make some of the sacrifices with me."

MOYERS: What about the recurring criticism of Jimmy Carter that he has no vision, that when he came to the White House in 1976, he knew he was here but he didn't know what to do with it. In fact, one of the common criticisms of the campaign is that he was unable to communicate some sense of his success and some sense of his ambitions for the second term because he really isn't sure, any moment, what he wants to do. Aaron Latham, writing in a magazine, said, "Conservatives perceived Carter to be a conservative and liberals perceived him to be a liberal. He was a presidential candidate without content who has given us a presidency without content," and that he "was and is a man without a vision."

JORDAN: If the word "vision" means in the sense that I think Mr. Latham used it — effective campaign rhetoric, talking about how great our country is and how great it could be — possibly we failed. But you don't need a vision of thousands of miles beyond this country's border or years away down the road to see that the problems that face this nation are tangible and they're right in front of us. And I think that President Carter's great strength has been as a problem solver. The problems that face this country don't lend themselves either to an ideological approach necessarily.

MOYERS: Vision?

JORDAN: I've been interested in the postmortems on the election that says this was a conservative trend in the country. I'm not— I think that's an oversimplification. I don't think our problems will be solved by a traditional Democratic approach or a traditional Republican approach. They are not ideological in that sense. We have again — to talk about something that I dwell on because it's central to so many of our nation's problems — we have a great energy problem and challenge that faces us in this country. It means that we should decrease our dependence on

foreign oil; it means that we should learn to conserve energy in this country; it means that we need to produce more and new forms of energy in this country. You know, that is not an ideological problem. So when you say President Carter lacks vision, he does if you mean, you know, hyperbole and campaign rhetoric. If you mean vision in terms of confronting the very real problems that face this country, I think he has vision. I think he has demonstrated it.

MOYERS: Were you aware of how people felt they were getting confusing signals over the years from the administration? I remember thinking, back in 1976, when he made a quite effective populist speech at the Democratic National Convention when he accepted the nomination and then went the next day to "21" and, in a sense, assured the business community that they had nothing to fear. One moment he was a populist egalitarian appealing to people for that. And another moment he was a fiscally-oriented business conservative. And the signals were confused.

JORDAN: This relates more to the complexities of the man and the fact that these labels that we are accustomed to using in politics don't fit Jimmy Carter easily or well. He is in one sense a man who was born in the south in a small town, a rural community, raised on a farm, went off to the Navy, served— attended the U.S. Naval Academy, was a captain of a nuclear submarine, came back and started his own business. So that's one Jimmy Carter. On the other hand, you've got a man who has a great compassion for people, and for human beings. So you have him, in one sense, he's a small businessman and a man from a small town. In another sense, growing out of his own experience of being in the south and growing up in the south and witnessing the enormous changes that took place there as a result of the civil rights movement, you've got a man who has an affinity and a deep feeling for disadvantaged people. So you have a man that comes to Washington with the objective on one hand of trying to balance the budget but at the same time a man who has appointed more women and blacks and browns to positions of responsibility in the federal government and to the federal judiciary than all of the previous presidents. So, President Carter is not a simple man, and because he's not a simple man, possibly he's not easily understood. But the complexity of the man — these different feelings and roots that he has — I think equipped him both as a candidate and as a president to deal with some of these problems.

MOYERS: Then how do you explain the perception that many people have that more than any recent president, Mr. Carter has had the most trouble adapting himself to the rules of Washington, the power struggles, the institutional tensions?

JORDAN: Again, it's because he was not of this city and of these political institutions and he came here and charted a different course. I can remember in '74 and '75 when, in our efforts around the country to win support, the people were still laughing at us. Governor Carter was a little too nice a guy to laugh at openly so they did it behind our back. But I can remember him going to ADA conventions with all the other Democratic candidates and being the only Democratic candidate to stand up and talk about trying to balance the federal budget and trying to reorganize the federal bureaucracy and people hissing or sometimes even booing him openly. He came to the presidency and to the nomination in '76 not obligated to the traditional power structure. And he came here and charted a different course — for the party and for the country. And one of the ironies is that he was caught in this cross-current of political change and international events in 1980.

MOYERS: "Caught in a cross-current." You know, once again, Jimmy Carter as victim. Jimmy Carter—

JORDAN: I don't mean to be making excuses. I hope I don't sound defensive. But I think he really was. The situation in Iran, these enormous OPEC price increases which played havoc with our economy. Again, I would venture to guess that in the next four years, President-elect Reagan will have a lot of the same misfortunes. And I would venture to guess now that any president over the next 15 or 20 years — maybe forever — is going to have difficulty getting re-elected, which is a concern I have. Because I hope we've not entered a period where we have one-term, disposable presidents where we elect a new face every four years and try him out for a couple of years and turn on him and then try somebody else. The nature of the problems that face our country deserves some continuity and probably deserves eight years. I say that and I hope I don't sound hypocritical because chances are—

MOYERS: Or endorsing Ronald Reagan?

JORDAN: —chances are four years from now I will vote for someone other than President Reagan. But there's something to be said for continuity in policy and consistency.

MOYERS: No one read the political scene better in 1972 than you did when you wrote your famous memo to Governor Carter about the possibility of his becoming president. And you saw the political scene of the late '70s quite well. How do you see the political scene now? Where are the forces aligning themselves? What's the new coalition going to look like, politically?

JORDAN: Well, the Democratic coalition is still there. But political power in both parties is fragmented. Thirty years ago, the power of the Democratic Party was based in the large cities — in the machines that got jobs for people and dealt with people's problems and delivered votes on Election Day. Those things have gone. This medium that we're using here [television] has become a dominant force in the electoral process. The Democratic coalition is loose. It's still valid; it's still there. But it's not five or six different groups. It used to be labor, blacks, liberals, Jews, some ethnics, Catholics. Today, they're seniors and consumers and environmentalists. There are not four or five elements of it but 30 or 40 elements to the traditional Democratic coalition. And to weave those diverse and disparate groups together and to focus them on what's best for the party and the country is a very difficult thing to do. It's a great challenge that faces our party and, as I said, we've got to be more than the party of the have-nots. Certainly that is something we can be proud of, but we have to also be a party that can solve this nation's problems. In the Republican Party, my guess is that just as President Carter, who was a centrist candidate and a centrist president, had problems within his own party from the left, I would guess that President-elect Reagan will have problems within his own party from the right.

MOYERS: Let me ask you some particular questions that linger from the last four years and they're more than just persnickity.

JORDAN: We'll see.

MOYERS: During the campaign of 1976, you promised that Jimmy Carter's government would be run by "people you've never heard of." You said—

JORDAN: I was talking about myself.

MOYERS: Well, then you said, "If after the inauguration, you find a Cy Vance—"

JORDAN: I can quote the rest of that for you, but go ahead.

MOYERS: Go ahead. Quote it.

JORDAN: "If you find a Cy Vance or Zbigniew Brzezinski in the administration, we will have failed."

MOYERS: All right. They wound up in your administration.

JORDAN: Yeah. Let me explain the context in which I said that. It was— there was an article written that suggested that the entire Carter Cabinet in 1976 would be peopled by basically everyone who had been in government before. And the point that I was trying to make was that I would hope that the Carter administration would not be just old and familiar faces but there would be plenty of new faces in the administration. I think if you look at the Cabinet choices and some of the Cabinet choices and changes that were made after the first two years and look particularly at the second and third levels of government — the people that have managed government and developed policy — I think you'll see a lot of new faces and a lot of fresh ideas that have grown out of this administration.

MOYERS: And yet, when Brzezinski and Vance wound up in the administration and Harold Brown at the Defense Department, it appeared to many people that Jimmy Carter was bringing to office men who had defended the Vietnam War — and I don't want to get into an argument on the war, but just on the judgment — even as now Reagan seems to be bringing into office men who had defended Watergate to the very end. And what does that say about presidents' choices?

JORDAN: It probably says something particularly about the fact that both then-Governor Carter and now-Governor Reagan were men without federal experience, men without foreign policy experience, and in your secretary of state and secretary of defense, you don't want to test people. You want to have people there who have a sense of that job and the enormous responsibilities that go with those jobs. I probably lacked the foresight then to see — and I used a couple of bad examples in terms of two of the very men that we selected — I lacked the foresight to see particularly in the jobs of secretary of state and secretary of defense, that a president needs experienced and mature people of the stature of Cyrus Vance and Harold Brown. And I was involved in that selection process. And by the time that we made those choices, it was apparent even to me that those were the kind of men that you needed to direct your foreign policy and defense.

MOYERS: So you didn't think, "My thoughts have come home to haunt me"?

JORDAN: Oh, I've said worse things than that that have come home to haunt me. That's just one that you're aware of.

MOYERS: What's the biggest mistake Hamilton Jordan made?

JORDAN: The biggest mistake that I made? I would say that I failed to assist the president sufficiently the first year

or year and a half in setting a few public priorities, a few things to work on. We came to Washington and jumped right in the middle of so many issues and sent so much legislation up to the Hill, a lot of which was enacted, that we failed to communicate effectively to the American people a sense of two or three big and important things. I think I could have been more helpful in that regard. And I made more than my share of mistakes, as I think most people will and do, that come into the White House for the first time. But that failure initially to set and communicate public priorities — a few public priorities — was something that I regret personally.

MOYERS: When I walked in here I thought, the day is coming when these people working in this building will be scattered once and for all. They never will all again be together in one place at one time.

JORDAN: I thought about that recently.

MOYERS: How does it make you feel?

JORDAN: I regret it very much — an unusually gifted and committed group of people who has served without selfish motive and for what they thought was in the best interest of the country. And I'll miss so many of these people here. We may set up a small government in exile down in Georgia.

MOYERS: You said, on January 16th, 1977, "I hope when this is over, I'll be strong enough to walk away." Are you?

JORDAN: Oh, yeah. I had told the president in April or May when I went over to the campaign that it was my intention to leave after re-election. I had intended for that to be a voluntary separation instead of an involuntary separation. I wanted to leave town, I didn't want to be run out. But I had planned to go and teach at Emory. I made those plans in the spring of last year. And, again, I don't want to spend my life — I'm very fortunate for the experience that I've had — but I don't want to spend my life living in the past. I want to look forward and to take on some new challenges and to do some different things. And as part of that, I thought it was important as a discipline at some point in time to say, "Well now, I've had enough and I'm going to turn and walk away from all this." And I was going to do it if we won. And of course, I have to do it now that we lost.

MOYERS: And I'll tell you from personal experience, it takes about six or seven years before they stop referring to you as "former assistant to the president." What about that headline in the *New York Times* this week: "Reagan asks for a first waltz and wins hearts in the Capitol" against all those similar things they were saying when Jimmy Carter strolled down Pennsylvania Avenue four years ago? They said he was charming his way into the country's hearts. And then the bottom fell out. What's in store for Ronald Reagan?

JORDAN: Well, a lot of those people that are waltzing with him are going to be stepping on his toes in a few months. Every new president needs and deserves a honeymoon, a chance to become established, to learn the great complexity of the job here. But Governor Reagan, if he deals with these great issues that face the American people — and I'm sure that it is his intention to — will find that there are plenty of problems and obstacles and misfortunes ahead for him just as there were for us the past four years. It's a very difficult job — governing in a very difficult time in our country's history.

MOYERS: What does it say to you, this now-familiar litany: Kennedy elected and assassinated, Johnson elected and discredited; Nixon elected and disgraced; Ford appointed and defeated; Carter elected and stymied?

JORDAN: I'll never think of it in those terms. I'll think of it as Carter elected. He came here; he did his job. He went home with his head high. And I think that history will judge him well and the accomplishments of this administration well.

MOYERS: But he was defeated.

JORDAN: Yes but we didn't— I could have constructed a scenario for President Carter where I think he would have been re-elected. It would have entailed him coming to Washington, deflecting these great issues, putting them off, posturing for four years. That was not the reason he ran for president in 1976. He ran for president in '76 to come to Washington to be a good president — not necessarily to be a popular president. And I would predict that if Governor Reagan deals with these issues — as he states he intends to — he may find himself not very popular in three or four years. That's the nature of the problems and the office.

MOYERS *[voice-over]*: From the White House, this has been one man's perspective on the Carter years, with Hamilton Jordan. I'm Bill Moyers.

Transcript produced by Journal Graphics, Inc., New York, N.Y.