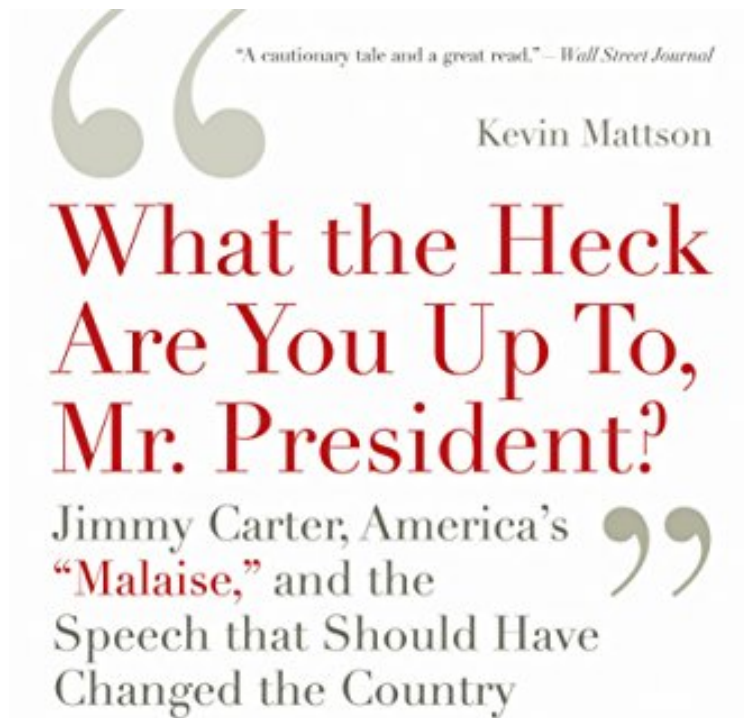


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'What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?': Jimmy Carter, America's 'Malaise,' and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country

Kevin Mattson

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Kevin Mattson : 'What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?': Jimmy Carter, America's 'Malaise,' and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised 'What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?': Jimmy Carter, America's 'Malaise,' and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Surprisingly GoodBy Campbell dropout This book really caught me off guard, I thought it would be some hokey book that tried to look back at pop culture and connect it to politics, to make for a more interesting read. Mattson doesn't go too deep in pop culture, he uses specific examples that actually shows the mood of the nation. The book covers a very interesting economic period in American history. My view on this time period is that it was one of the worst economic times since the depression (even compared to the great recession we currently face today, I believe the late seventies through the early eighties were a lot tougher). The book shows the creation of the religious right and their power as a voting group. Shows the rising star of Ronald Reagan before the 1980 election. It also shows the inner workings of a White House staff, the role of advisers and the influence they have on the President. The only complaints I have with the book is I wish Mattson would went into more detail about the resignation of Carter's staff and the forward in the book written by Hertzberg is horrible. I think Hertzberg is really in love with himself, his forward has several mistakes (such as Carter's political record, he never lost the Georgia State Senate seat) and is based more on opinion instead of fact. The speech by Carter is very interesting and I believe a lot of what it states rings true today. The book also shows how a moderate politician was destroyed. As a moderate the other side already hates and then some of your own base starts to turn against you. I would recommend this book to anyone that enjoys politics or history.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A very interesting book By Russell Ferri A very detailed account of the process behind the speech. While the author did some original research (interviews) it reads primarily as a summary of data already collected by others, which at times makes it a bit stale. Also, some of the juxtapositions of political events with cultural events seems a bit stretched and also could have used some editing. The author's own conclusions as to why the speech should have resonated more are rather brief, which is a good or bad thing depending on what you're looking for. Overall, a very interesting and well-written book which seems very timely

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. "Crisis of Cognitive Dissonance" By Seven Zero Mattson does an excellent job of pulling all the events together that were taking place around both the U.S. and the world and among Carter's staff and opponents. In a fashion close to the style of Barbara Tuchman he paints a complete and vivid portrait of a historic event. I believe that even if many of the events are familiar to you he still manages to create a nature of suspense that will draw you in. This should be considered an important historical event and what has resulted from it is much like that event in the "Guns of August" with percussions that still soundly resonate today. It may very well surprise you. I read it in 2 days and I am a slow reader. But to my surprise it opened my eyes even wider than I might have hoped for. It was a strange kind of coincidence that these two things happened to me a few days ago. One was, and I can't remember how it caught my attention, but I think it was some how connected to some research I was doing on cognitive biases and came across the term "cognitive dissonance". The other was a comment Dianne Rehm made on her NPR show. I don't recall the subject they were discussing but she threw in a quick comment on Carter's "malaise speech". The way her voice is so frail and shaky made it hard to understand and at my first try searching online I had not a clue on how to spell it. But my first successful page from my first hit brought me to an article that was interesting enough to make me want more information. On the side bar was this book they were referring to and I ordered it. I highly recommend "What the Heck Are You Up to Mr. President?" by Kevin Mattson. We are on the cusp of something that may be even harder to deal with than those times and issues of which Carter's July 15, 1979 "Crisis of Confidence" speech was about. Amazingly that coincidence now feels like some sort of twist of fate making a connection for me that adds even more to my knowledge. That speech for the most part could be given quite appropriately today, but it would be better named "Crisis of Cognitive Dissonance". The book I think, while it doesn't say so is the best explanation as to why we don't here the truth from politicians, especially during the last year of a president's first term. It is more than applicable following this last State of the Union Address. Obama is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. If there is one thing greater than anything else that a political opponent can use against you, it is when you tell the truth and the truth isn't good news. The public can be like children offered candy and will easily be persuaded by almost anything other than an ugly truth. A couple days ago I came across this quote: by Marcel Proust, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." This book in my experience so far is the most poignant book regarding the times we now live in. If it doesn't give one "new" eyes it will at the very least open eyes wider. Those dreadfully long gas lines, closed stations and the alarming reactions of people to that situation of 1979 will inevitably occur again. There was no plan then and there still is no real preparation for such an event still. Add to that the complications of a failing economy and there is even less room for hope. It is imperative that not only do we understand our situation, but that we be prepared for the possibilities of the choices we may or may not make. If we are to learn from history, than take the lesson offered here. This book is well written in describing what was going on at that point that drove Carter to give such a needed speech, how it was initially received so unexpectedly well and failed so horribly 2 days later turning out to be thee weapon that defeated him. It is an amazing story. What is even more amazing is that I expect that the need is there again but in spades and the window we now have before us will not remain open long. Mattson does an excellent job of pulling all the events together that were taking place around both the U.S. and the world and among Carter's staff and opponents. In a fashion close to the style of Barbara Tuchman he paints a complete and vivid portrait of a historic event. I believe that even if many of the events are familiar to you he

still manages to create a nature of suspense that will draw you in. This should be considered an important historical event and what has resulted from it much like that event in the "Guns of August" has had percussions that still resonate today. It may very well surprise you. I read it in 2 days and I am a slow reader. But to my surprise it opened my eyes even wider than I might have hoped for.

At a critical moment in Jimmy Carter's presidency, he gave a speech that should have changed the country, instead it led to his downfall and ushered in the rise of the Conservative movement in America. Kevin Mattson gives us a behind-the-scenes look at the weeks leading up to the speech, a period of great upheaval in the US: the energy crisis had generated mile-long gas lines, inciting suburban riots and violence, the country's morale was low and Carter's ratings were even lower. The administration, wracked by its own crises, was in constant turmoil and conflict. What came of their great internal struggle, which Mattson conveys with the excitement of a political thriller, was a speech that deserves a place alongside Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" or FDR's First Inaugural. Prominent politicians on both sides of the aisle play important roles, including President Jimmy Carter, Vice President Walter Mondale, and speechwriter Hendrik Hertzberg, within the administration, and Jerry Falwell, Ronald Reagan, and Ted Kennedy, without. Like the best of political writing, Mattson provides great insight into the workings of the Carter White House as well as the moral crisis that ushered in a new, conservative America.

From Publishers Weekly
The 1979 national malaise speech that defined Jimmy Carter's presidency—though he never used the word malaise—gets its due in this contrarian homage. Ohio University historian Mattson (*When America Was Great*) considers the speech—which expressed Carter's own crisis of confidence, bemoaned Americans' loss of faith in government and deplored the country's selfishness and consumerism—to be a thoughtful response to the problems of the day that initially won public acclaim, before political opponents caricatured it as a gloomy scolding. Following the speech from its bizarre provenance in an apocalyptic memo by pollster Pat Cadell through its honing during a messianic domestic summit, the author sets his colorful study against a recap of the gasoline shortages, inflation and Me Decade angst that provoked it. He interprets it as a tantalizing road not taken: with its prescient focus on energy, limits and sacrifice, its humility and honesty, it was, the author says, the antithesis of the Reagan era's sunny optimism. Mattson makes Carter's maligned speech a touchstone for a rich retrospective and backhanded appreciation of the soul-searching '70s. (July) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Excellent... a cautionary tale and a great read... Those of us who were around back in the day will be ruefully reminded of those bygone times. And those who weren't will be scratching their heads in disbelief at this fascinating and frequently improbable history." Wall Street Journal
That Mr. Carter felt he had to deliver such a risky speech says a great deal about the political fix he was in at the time. It says plenty, too, about where the wobbling American psyche stood during the weird, unnerving summer of 1979... In his new book, "What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?", Kevin Mattson... lays out the events of that summer like a big, rolling banquet... the historical ingredients are fascinating and first-rate. Mr. Mattson writes well about Mr. Carter's staff and the intense jockeying that led up to the malaise speech. Dwight Garner, New York Times
[A] detailed unpacking of the speech and the tumultuous events that inspired it. LA Times
Despite a brief bump in the president's approval ratings, the address became forever disparaged as the "malaise" speech, and it doomed Carter's reelection chances. That speech, history has concluded, was a huge mistake. Ohio University historian Kevin Mattson challenges that conclusion in his feisty new book. Chronicling the mood inside the White House and across the nation in the months surrounding the speech -- months when gas lines and Three Mile Island monopolized the news while "The Deer Hunter" and "disco sucks!" dominated the zeitgeist -- Mattson offers a radically different reading. Carlos Lozada, Washington Post
[In] the summer of 1979, the country seemed to be imploding in the face of a gas crisis, resulting in long lines at the pump, trucker strikes and violence. The nation's confidence plummeted and calls for "inspirational and innovative leadership" remained unheeded. Starting on July 4, Carter holed up at Camp David for ten days, emerging with a legendary address... that would both galvanize and deeply cleave the country. Mattson... sifts through the varied media coverage of the event to isolate this crucial moment in America's recognition of itself... A galloping history full of interesting characters and significant moments. Kirkus
This book becomes a page-turner for those interested in the decadent disco decade, Jimmy Carter himself, and the modern presidency. Library Journal
In "What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?" Kevin Mattson revisits Jimmy Carter's speech delivered to a national audience on July 15, 1979. That address came to be known as the 'malaise' speech, though Carter never used the word. The President did mention 'paralysis and stagnation and drift,' but he also spoke of 'strength' and 'a rebirth of the American spirit.' Mattson offers a deep reading of the speech, placing it in the cultural and political contexts of the late 1970s. The result is an eye-opening inquiry into the power of words at a pivotal moment in history. Louis P. Masur, author of *The Soiling of Old Glory*
Boldly and with great style, Kevin Mattson captures the political, social, and cultural events that shaped Jimmy Carter's 'Malaise' speech of July 15 1979. He reveals how events abroad and at home--in the White House, at gas stations, on TV, and in learned books--shaped an opportunity to

confront the energy problem, which the nation avoided at its own peril.” Daniel Horowitz, professor of American Studies at Smith College and author of *The Anxieties of Affluence*. About the Author Kevin Mattson is the Connor S tudy Professor of Contemporary History at Ohio University. He's the author of *Rebels All!*, *When America Was Great*, *Upton Sinclair and the Other American Century*, and *Intellectuals in Action*. He writes for the *American Prospect*, *Dissent*, *the Nation*, *the New York Times Book* , *the Washington Post Book World*, and many others.