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Carter: A Shift at the Top

By Henry Mitchell

President Carter's new hairdo was shifted the part of his hair from the right side to the left.

At dawn I got a phone call about this from the office, asking what does it mean?

"Mr. Powell," I commenced with the president's press secretary at the other end of the line, "the entire city has been waked up on an emergency basis. It's said the president will be totally bald by Memorial Day. First, have you seen any incipient baldness there, that Mr. Carter is trying to hide, and second, what has the White House to say about this startling development in our national leadership?"

"I can't tell you anything about the new haircut," said Jody Powell, overwhelmed with guilt I suppose, "because frankly I didn't think to ask him about it."

"I've been busy," he said, "with the Holocaust victim ceremonies and oil and the windfall profit tax and so on, and I didn't think to ask about the haircut."

President Changes Hair Style, Triggers Speculation

"You didn't ask about the haircut," I repeated.

"I think I see a time I can pop in and ask him," said the press secretary. "There's a news conference coming up later, and I guess there will be questions about the hair. Maybe no questions on oil, but plenty on hair."

"If one may say so, Mr. Powell, first things first. You haven't seen any bald spots yourself?"

"No," he said.

"Now this may not be a meaningful thing," I said, trying to sound like a big thinker. "In fact, it could be nothing more than the president forgetting to tell his bar-

ber he parts his hair on the right, and barber just willy-nilly cut it so he had part it on the left."

"That's possible," said Powell. "Bringing I imagine, at the thought the might come to naught."

On the other hand, it may be important. With half the East Coast wakened to a you can hardly say the matter is tri and one might hope the press secretary would know something.

Didn't think to ask Mr. God, where's the world be if everybody didn't this ask?

But onward with analysis. Certain abilities must be thought of. Keeping an mind and ruling out nothing, we may

• Adolf Hitler and Abraham Lincoln parted on the right, as Carter formerly. The president's new look may constitute total rejection of Hitler, Lincoln and sons of that sort.

• Billy Carter, the president's bro parts his hair on the right. The president by changing to the left, may be setting

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distance between himself and the colorful Billy, who has upset certain members of the Jewish community. The president may be wooing the Jewish vote, clearly.

• The best writers, eggheads and artists tend to part their hair on the right. The president's switch may foretell a resurgence of his populist image, a moving away from anything suggesting an elite. He has had a day of ballet at the White House and may well have sought a counterbalance. All Nebraska farmers and all rednecks (with a few exceptions) part on the left, and the president may well wish to tend in that direction, especially since the Supreme Court has become more and more wrongheaded.

• The president is of an age that throws even good men into confusion. It is an age at which some "chuck it" and head to Samoa for a life of beach-combing. Others liquidate all their assets and run off with an unsuitable person, usually yellow-haired, to find a "new life" while still others go berserk in California, which is designed specifically for the spiritual needs and chemical disturbances of males no longer in the first flush of youth.

Nobody has seen even the slightest sign of the president's running off to Samoa or behaving immaturally—to use the word usually used for mature men's behavior.

And yet thoughtful analysts must consider the outside possibility the president has a yen for the Tidal Basin or something of the sort. One of the first signs of insanity among the middle-aged is a change of hair style, a return to blue jeans and a chain about the neck.

If, however, the president should follow this with shirts open to the fourth button, or starts affecting Adidas shoes or even Hush Puppies or (there is no point dodging this eventually) takes to bleaching his hair, then a period of potential crisis will have been entered, conceivably.

• On the other hand, if the president has simply discovered that excellent barber at Fessenden and Wisconsin which has barbers of the old school and sensible prices, and merely neglected to say "part it on the right as usual," then there is little to fear.

The whole incident may mean nothing more than that the president has not noticed the change made by his barber or (like the press secretary) concerned himself with it.

On balance, the most reliable analysts appear to be in full agreement here:

• The change in the president's hair may foretell a season of upheaval in old ways, a break with civilized mores. The Health, Education and Welfare Department, for example, might be given increased power or even the Supreme Court.

The change in hair may forecast, on the other hand, a return to cheaper barbershop prices and the style of Minnesota. (All tractor drivers part on the left.)

• Either way, the situation bears close watching. If the president starts talking about sharing this and that experience with us, or starts appearing naked to the waist with turquoise, the situation may be regarded as grave.

One graybeard, asked what should be done in that case, said: "In that case, to hell with it. Take the first boat to Samoa."



President Carter's new hair style, left, and the old, right. UPI photos