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http://voices.washingtonpost.com/political-bookworm/2010/09/embargoed_carter_book_lands_on.html

Publisher Violates Its Own Embargo

Jimmy Carter's publisher releases his new diaries early—and accidentally—online.

Next Tuesday, Farrar, Straus and Giroux will release Jimmy Carter's *White House Diary*, a book that, even at 592 pages, is a condensed and annotated version of the 5,000 pages Carter compiled while president. *White House Diary* will get the standard political book roll-out—[media appearances](#), a [book tour](#), and, presumably, a whole lot of reviews. But here's something new: Carter's *Diary* [can be previewed on Google Books](#) right now, a week before its publication.

What makes this new—and, even more, what makes it weird—is that publishers tend to be very protective of their political titles. While reviewers normally get an “advanced readers edition” weeks or even months before a book's release date, political books are different. Publishers often mail review copies on the same day the book comes out; if they're feeling really generous, they mail the book (along with a non-disclosure agreement) a week before the release date. That's what Farrar, Straus and Giroux did with *White House Diary*, and this process seems reasonable since, for political books, the details are often the payoff. A political book's revelations and its newsy spin will power the early publicity, and publishers work very hard to make sure this coincides with the book actually being in stores.

Reporters, of course, work just as hard to dig this information up. Laura Bush's memoir, *Spoken from the Heart*, came out on May 4 of this year, but the *New York Times* ran a story summarizing the book's greatest hits [on April 27](#). The *Times*' full review went live [the next day](#), and [other outlets \(including the Post\)](#) tracked down early copies of their own. The *Times*, which said only that it obtained *Spoken from the Heart* “at a bookstore,” attracted a fair amount of [industry outrage](#) for breaking the Laura Bush embargo. But this sort of thing has been going on for a while now—and has been kneecapping the *Times* as much as anyone else.

Let's take the example of Richard Nixon. In 1976, the *Times*' syndication arm bought the serial rights to *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* for \$750,000 and, by selling excerpts to more than 60 newspapers and magazines around the world, turned that investment into just under \$1 million. When the Nixon page proofs were ready, the *Times* sent a courier to the printer in Crawfordsville, Indiana. The courier carried one half of an official letter, the printer held the other, Pinkerton guards watched over the whole thing—and, just to make sure, the *Times* called ahead with a physical description of its man. These security measures actually made sense. A few weeks before, the *Times* had orchestrated the syndication of Nixon aide H. R. Haldeman's *The Ends of Power*. When the Post obtained a bootleg copy and ran a summary 12 days before the book's release, it cost the *Times* almost \$500,000 in syndication revenue.

This is where broken embargoes have done most of their damage. Bookstores big and small [sign affidavits](#) promising not to sell their inventory before the release date, but the media have never reached a similar consensus. That's one reason we've seen a decline in [major syndication deals](#)

for political books. In fact, it's one reason Carter's *White House Diary* isn't getting syndicated at all.

Except it sort of is, thanks to Google Books. There, you can read Carter's new preface, some other paratexts, and the first 50 pages of the diary—up to the entry for May 9, 1977. This doesn't seem to be Google's fault. Different publisher negotiates different deals for the searchability of their new books, and Farrar, Straus and Giroux makes many of its titles available for preview, generally a week or two before their release dates. (See, for example, Mark Feldstein's [*Poisoning the Press*](#) and Michael Cunningham's [*By Nightfall*](#), both of which come out September 28.) I asked John Sterling, editor of *White House Diary* and Executive Vice President of Macmillan, what happened here. Sterling reemphasized the Carter embargo and promised to take *White House Diary* down from Google Books. He added: "We consider this the sort of glitch that is bound to happen occasionally given the technical complexities involved in coordinating the publication of books in both physical and electronic form."