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## Jimmy Carter Biography

**James Earl Carter, Jr.** (born October 1, 1924) was the 39th (1977-1981) President of the United States. Since leaving office, he has been active in international public policy and conflict resolution. He is also an author. He won the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize.

Significant foreign policy accomplishments of his administration included the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David Accords (the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel), the SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union, and the establishment of U.S. diplomatic relations with China. On the domestic side, his administration oversaw the founding of the Department of Energy and the Department of Education, along with strong legislation on environmental protection.

### Early years

Carter was born in the town of Plains, Georgia, to James Earl Carter and Bessie Lillian Gordy. He was the first president born in a hospital. He grew up in nearby Archery. He attended Georgia Southwestern College and the Georgia Institute of Technology, and received a B.S. degree from the United States Naval Academy in 1946, the same year he married Rosalynn Smith. He served on submarines in the Atlantic and Pacific fleets, and was later selected by Admiral Hyman Rickover for the U.S. Navy's nuclear submarine program. Upon the death of his father in 1953, he resigned from the Navy and established a peanut farming business in Plains. From a young age, Carter showed a deep commitment to Christianity, serving as a Sunday School teacher throughout his political career.

### Early political career

Carter started his career by serving on the Plains school board. In the 1960s he served two terms in the Georgia State Senate.

In his 1970 campaign Carter was elected governor on a pro-George Wallace platform. Carter's campaign aides handed out thousands of photographs of his opponent, the liberal former Gov. Carl Sanders, showing Sanders associating with black basketball players. On the stump, Carter pledged to reappoint an avowed segregationist to the state Board of Regents. He promised as his first act to invite former Alabama Gov. George Wallace into the state to speak. Old-line segregationists across the state endorsed Carter for governor.

But following his election, Carter said in speeches that the time of racial segregation was over, and that racial discrimination had no place in the future of the state. He was the first state-wide office holder in the Deep South to say this in public (such sentiments would have signaled the end of the political career of politicians in the region less than 15 years earlier, as was the case with Atlanta mayor Ivan Allen, who testified before Congress in favor of the Voting Rights Act), so his victory attracted some attention as a sign of changing times. Carter served as governor of the state of Georgia from 1971 to 1975 but failed in his re-election bid, having alienated both the voters and the state legislature through what has been described as an imperial style of governing.

When Carter entered the Democratic Party Presidential primaries in 1976 he at first was considered to have little chance against nationally better-known politicians. However the Watergate scandal was still fresh in the voters' minds, so his position as an outsider distant from Washington, DC became an asset. He ran an effective campaign, did well in debates, and won his party's nomination and then the election. Government reorganization was the centerpiece of his campaign platform. He was the first candidate from the Deep South to be elected president since the American Civil War.

### Presidency

As part of his government reorganization efforts, Carter separated the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) into the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. He also elevated the Energy agency into a new cabinet-level department, the United States Department of Energy.

The Carter Administration's foreign policy is best remembered for the peace treaty he brokered between the states of Israel and Egypt with the Camp David Accord, the SALT II treaty brokered with the Soviet Union, the Panama Canal treaty which turned the canal over to Panama, and an energy crisis. He was much less successful on the domestic front, having alienated both his own party and his opponents through what was perceived as a lack of willingness to work with Congress — much as he had in his term as Governor.

On July 15, 1979, Carter gave a nationally televised address in which he identified what he believed to be a crisis of confidence among the American people. This has come to be

known as his "malaise" speech, even though he never actually used the word "malaise" anywhere in the text:

I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy.... I do not refer to the outward strength of America, a nation that is at peace tonight everywhere in the world, with unmatched economic power and military might.

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation.

Carter's speech, or rather sermon, was well-received. The country was in the worst recession since the 1930s, with inflation and unemployment at record levels. But the people who had hoped for more inspiring leadership were disappointed. Two days after the speech, Carter asked for the resignations of all of his Cabinet officers, and ultimately accepted five. With no visible efforts towards a way out of the malaise, Carter's poll numbers dropped even further.

Among Presidents who served at least one full term, Carter is the only one who never made an appointment to the Supreme Court.

#### Foreign policies

Carter promoted his foreign policy as being one that would place human rights at the forefront. This was intended to be a break from the policies of the Nixon administration, in which human rights abuses were often overlooked if they were committed by a nation that was allied to the United States. The Carter administration ended support to the historically U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, and gave millions of dollars in aid to the nation's new regime, following a pro-democracy coup.

The main conflict between human rights and U.S. interests came in Carter's dealings with the Shah of Iran. The Shah had been a strong ally of America since World War II, and was one of the few U.S.-friendly regimes in the Middle East. However, his rule was strongly autocratic. Though Carter praised the Shah as a wise and valuable leader, when a popular uprising against the monarchy broke out in Iran, the Carter administration did not intervene.

The Shah was deposed and exiled. Many have since connected the Shah's dwindling U.S. support as a leading cause of his quick overthrow. Carter was initially prepared to recognize the revolutionary government of the monarch's successor, but his efforts proved futile.

In 1979, Carter reluctantly allowed the deposed Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi into the United States for political asylum and medical treatment. In response to the Shah's entry into the U.S., Iranian militants seized the American embassy in Tehran taking 52 Americans hostage and demanded the Shah's return to Iran for trial and execution. Though later that year the Shah would leave the US and die in Egypt, the Iran hostage crisis continued, and dominated the last year of Carter's presidency. The subsequent responses to the crisis, from a "Rose Garden strategy" of staying inside the White House, to the botched attempt to rescue the hostages, were largely seen as contributing to defeat in the 1980 election.

Although the Carter team had pursued the release of the hostages, an agreement for their release was not signed until January 19, 1981, after the election of Ronald Reagan. In what many observers have seen as a slight against Carter, the Iranians waited to release the captives until minutes after Reagan was sworn-in as president. The hostages had been held captive for 444 days.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was a response to the U.S. military presence there, according to Carter's National Security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. After the invasion, Carter announced the Carter Doctrine, according to which the U.S. would not allow any outside power to gain control of the Persian Gulf. Also in response to the events in Afghanistan, Carter prohibited Americans from participating in the 1980 Summer Olympics, which were held in Moscow, and he reinstated registration for the draft for young males.

In order to oppose the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski started a \$40 billion program of training Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In retrospect, this contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, but, ironically, is also often tied to the resulting instability of post-Soviet Afghani governments, which led to the rise of Islamic theocracy in the region. Some even tie the program to the 1996 coup that established the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and to the creation of violent Islamic terrorist groups. At the time, and perhaps continuing into the Reagan and G.H.W. Bush presidencies, Islamic fundamentalism as a political force was not well understood.

#### Controversies

Members of the Reagan-Bush campaign and administration (most notably Barbara Honegger, in her book *October Surprise*), and the president of Iran in 1980 (Abu Al-Hasan Bani-Sadr, *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution and Secret Deals With the U.S.*) have alleged that a secret agreement between the Reagan campaign (orchestrated by George H. W. Bush) was responsible for destroying a deal between the Carter administration and the Iranian government that would have had the hostages released in October 1980. Such a scenario was termed "The October Surprise" by the Reagan team. Unnamed sources also

are alleged to have claimed that it was blackmail over the deal that led to the U.S. involvement in the later Iran-Contra scandal, as Iran demanded to be sold weapons to use in its war against Iraq if the Reagan administration wanted it to keep quiet. It should be noted that none of these allegations has been proven or even officially investigated by any governmental body.

During Carter's administration, diplomatic recognition was switched from the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China, a policy continued into the 21st century. In response, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act.

Carter has been accused of ordering a cover-up of the events at Three Mile Island following the near meltdown of that nuclear plant. He has also been criticized for not doing enough to promote his stated human rights foreign policy stance in his administration, such as continuing to support the Indonesian government even while it was implicated in the commission of acts of genocide in the occupation of East Timor.

#### Post-Presidency

Since losing his bid for re-election, Carter has been involved in a variety of public policy, human rights, and charitable causes. His work in international public policy and conflict resolution is largely through the Carter Center. The center also focuses on world-wide health care including the campaign to eliminate guinea worm disease.

He and members of the center are sometimes involved in the monitoring of the electoral process in support of free and fair elections. This includes acting as election observers, particularly in Latin America and Africa.

Because he had served as a submariner (the only President to have done so), a submarine was named for him. The USS Jimmy Carter (SSN-23) was named on April 27, 1998, making it one of the very few US Navy vessels to be named for a person still alive at the time of the naming.

Carter visited Cuba in May 2002 meeting with Fidel Castro and becoming the first President of the United States, in or out of office, to visit the island since Castro's 1959 revolution.

Not all Carter's efforts have gained him favor in Washington; President Clinton and both Presidents George H.W. and George W. Bush were said to have been less than pleased with Carter's "freelance" diplomacy in Iraq and elsewhere.

Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development. He was the third U.S. president, after Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, to receive the award.

In March 2004 Carter roundly condemned George W. Bush and Tony Blair for waging an unnecessary war "based upon lies and misinterpretations" in order to oust Saddam Hussein. He claimed that Blair had allowed his better judgement to be swayed by Bush's desire to finish a war that his father had started.

He and his wife Rosalynn are also well-known for their work with Habitat for Humanity.

#### Cabinet

United States Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, Edmund S. Muskie (1980)  
United States Secretary of the Treasury W. Michael Blumenthal, G. William Miller (1979)  
United States Secretary of Defense Harold Brown  
United States Attorney General Griffin B. Bell, Benjamin R. Civiletti (1979)  
United States Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus  
United States Secretary of Agriculture Robert S. Bergland  
United States Secretary of Commerce Juanita M. Kreps, Philip M. Klutznick (1980)  
United States Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall  
United States Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Patricia R. Harris (1979)  
United States Secretary of Health and Human Services Patricia R. Harris  
United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Patricia R. Harris, Moon Landrieu (1979)  
United States Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams, Neil E. Goldschmidt (1979)  
United States Secretary of Energy James R. Schlesinger, James Rodney, Charles W. Duncan, Jr. (1979)  
United States Secretary of Education Shirley Hufstедler

#### Bibliography

Jimmy Carter has been a relatively prolific author. As of 2003 he has written the following:

Why Not the Best? (1975 and 1996)  
A Government as Good as Its People (1977 and 1996)  
Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President (1982 and 1995)  
Negotiation: The Alternative to Hostility (1984)  
The Blood of Abraham (1985 and 1993)

Everything to Gain: Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life (1987 and 1995), with Rosalynn Carter  
An Outdoor Journal (1988 and 1994)  
Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age (1992)  
Talking Peace: A Vision for the Next Generation (1993 and 1995)  
Always a Reckoning (1995), a collection of poetry, illustrated by his granddaughter  
The Little Baby Snoogle-Fleejer (1995), a children's book, illustrated by his daughter  
Living Faith (1996)  
Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith (1997)  
The Virtues of Aging (1998)  
An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood (2001)  
Christmas in Plains: Memories (2001)  
The Nobel Peace Prize Lecture (2002)  
The Hornet's Nest (2003), a historical novel and the first work of fiction written by a U.S. President

Here are some books written about Jimmy Carter:

Jones, Charles O. The Trusteeship presidency: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1988  
Jordan, Hamilton Crisis: the last year of the Carter Presidency NY: Putnam, 1982  
Jordan, William J. Panama Odyssey Austin: UT Press, 1984  
Kaufman, Burton I. The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.. Lawrence, KS: U. of KS, 1993  
Kucharsky, David The Man from Plains: The Mind and Spirit of Jimmy Carter. NY: Harper & Row, 1976  
Lance, Bert The Truth of the Matter: my life in and out of politics NY: Summit Books, 1991

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