

The everchanging reputation of Jimmy Carter Rosebrook, Jennifer.

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Abstract:

Jimmy Carter seemed to be the appropriate presidential candidate in the election of 1976 due to his personal characteristics of honesty, devotion to others and his incredible work ethic. He provided a type of possible salvation from the dual fiascos of Watergate and Vietnam, which had caused many Americans to simply write the political system off as corrupt, especially the presidential office. The political climate post Watergate is important to understand as well as the type of man Americans were willing to elect in 1976. Many scholars have looked to the Moral Jimmy (Morris Jimmy Carter: American Moralist) as just that type of man and yet that same trait may have made getting anything done a more difficult task in Washington. From his childhood and through his Naval career, Mr. Carter personified the small town boy. Growing up in a small Southern peanut farm, the Carters were never a rich family. Often waking early in the morning to help his father with chores, a sense of hard work was ingrained at an early age. Religion played a key role in his upbringing, as did the role of family, especially his mother. Incensed by the inequities he found in his post WWII hometown he entered politics. From a Georgia Senate seat to the governor's mansion, Carter worked hard, promised not to lie, and to be thrifty with the people's money. (Carter, *Why Not the Best*, Bourne, Jimmy Carter and Hyatt, *The Carters of Plains*) The Election of 1976 was in many ways a new type of election, altered by legislation hoping to curb the powers of an imperialistic president and yet it was also dominated not by the issues that had dominated early elections, for example civil rights and the policies in Vietnam. (Schram, *Running for President 1976: The Carter Campaign*, Bitzer and Rueter, *Carter v Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976*) Instead, it was a contest between two men promising healing and a new outsider perspective. In many ways, American voters said that they wanted a man of integrity first and then worry about the issues the nation was facing because without trust all else was a mute point. (see Appendix M: Carter's Acceptance Speech at the Democratic Convention) Everything about his childhood and political career seemed to say that Carter was sincere in his goals, yet as crisis after crisis arose during his presidency he found it increasingly difficult to balance his personal feelings of morality with the political massaging necessary to get things done in Washington. From the Middle East to the economy, the Iranian hostage situation and the environment, Carter was always trying to do the "right thing." The hard work turned out to be overworked and the honesty was sometimes too honest for many American to swallow. (See Carter's "Crisis of Confidence" Speech) Of course, Carter's presidency has been viewed as ineffective and filled with contradictions (Mollenhoff, *The President Who Failed: Carter Out of Control* and Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*) In many ways the characteristics that made Carter a viable and popular candidate also hampered his ability to participate in the political process. Carter struggled with his desire to do the right thing in a world where that was not always possible. However once free from the constraints of the Oval Office, Congress and the constant scrutiny of the press, a Carter enveloped by his passions is revealed. (Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*) Carter's human rights efforts around the world have been recognized, including a Noble Prize.

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James Earl Carter Jr. (born October 1, 1924) is an American politician and philanthropist, who served as the 39th president of the United States from 1977 to 1981. A member of the Democratic Party, he previously served as a Georgia State Senator from 1963 to 1967 and as the 76th governor of Georgia from 1971 to 1975. Since leaving the presidency, Carter has remained engaged in political and social projects as a private citizen. In 2002, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in co-founding The presidency of Jimmy Carter began at noon on January 20, 1977, when Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as the 39th President of the United States, and ended on January 20, 1981. Carter, a Democrat from Georgia, took office after defeating incumbent Republican President Gerald Ford in the 1976 presidential election. Following his defeat, Carter was succeeded by Republican Ronald Reagan, who won the 1980 presidential election. Jimmy Carter was a new face on the American political horizon. Rising from relative obscurity to the Presidency during a two-year campaign characterized by its hard work and attention to detail, Jimmy Carter excited a large portion of the electorate. Carter seemed to appeal to those outside of the mainstream of American politics, asking them in countless speeches and gatherings, to send an "outsider" to Washington. President Carter's first year brought him face to face with the everyday realities of American politics. On the plus side, Congress enacted, with some changes, the Administration's revision of the Social Security system, increasing both the wage base and rate of taxation, in an effort to generate the revenue needed to continue the program.