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**Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter: A Moral Compass That Established an American Political
System**

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Abstract

The 1970s brought an economic, social, and political change in America. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter created a new wave of traditional, moral ideologies that shaped America for generations. As a Washington outsider, the Carter team swept through Washington, bringing reforms based on honest integrity, social restructuring, and moral underpinning that challenged the established broken political system of the Nixon/Ford years. Relying on their strength with one another, they reimagined domestic and foreign policies by strengthening the office of First Lady, giving a voice to minorities, establishing various new positions, taking on Congress, and creating a hallmark of peace arrangement with the Camp David Accords. The Carters did not stop once they left the White House, as they continued their passionate work of making the world a better place by establishing the Carter Center and other various projects. Through the Carter Center, the Carters have established multiple projects such as guinea worm eradication and helping with free elections worldwide. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter have left a lasting legacy on America that future presidents have strived to model as they seek to make the world better for mankind.

Acknowledgments

I am a child of history, as I have grown up with history books in my hands for as long as I can remember. My parents would take me to every historical site we could find. My Nanny would take me to the library every summer, and we would sit in the historical section for hours, looking over all the books on every subject matter. This would not be possible without their countless love and support. They have guided me through life and raised me to be who I am today. My mother even took on the role of reading every paper I have written multiple times. Even though my Nanny never lived to see this dissertation or degree happen, I know she has the best seat in the house.

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forget to find joy in the little things in life. I have always admired how you showed strength in times of uncertainty, but you have shown me how to find my voice and my strength to face the uncertainty in life. Thank you for being up to go on every adventure I seem to find and always willing to try new things. I love you, and we will always be Twanda!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On November 2, 1976, the American people rallied to the polls to either elect the old regime of Gerald Ford or take a gamble under the new guard of Jimmy Carter. As midnight approached, states like New York, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Iowa, Virginia, Maine, Mississippi, Hawaii, and New Mexico made this election the tightest presidential race regarding electoral votes since 1916.¹ Both candidates were exhausted from the campaign's grueling mental and physical demands. Carter and Ford were ready to take on the presidency if elected by the American people. Both were eager to create a political cabinet to establish platforms that positively affect the United States of America. After Election Day at 3:00 a.m., poll workers still counted votes in Ohio. At this point, the candidates were separated by only two-tenths of a percentage point. In the early morning following Election Day, Carter and Ford were separated by a mere thirty-one votes in Maine. In Hawaii, precincts waited for late returns to determine if their four electoral votes would be cast for the underdog Jimmy Carter or the incumbent, Gerald Ford. Many Americans were in shock when the Presidential race in 1976 was called in favor of a dark-horse candidate, Jimmy Carter from Georgia.²

Gerald Ford sent President-elect Carter a congratulatory telegram early on November 3, and Ford and his family met with the press. Ford had First Lady Betty read her husband's concession remarks. "The President asked me to tell you that he telephoned President-elect Carter a short time ago and congratulated him on his victory. The President also wants to thank

¹ The election of 1916 was between Democratic Incumbent Woodrow Wilson and Republican Charles Evans Hughes. It was a narrow defeat by Wilson as he garnered 49.4 percent of the popular vote and 277. Hughes trailed with 46.2 percent of the popular vote and 254 electoral votes.

² "1976 Presidential Election," *Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed July 8, 2023, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/museum/exhibits/1976election/afterward.html>.

all those thousands of people who worked so hard on his behalf and the millions who supported him with their votes. It has been the greatest honor of my husband's life to have served his fellow Americans during 2 of the most difficult years in our history.”³ Ford's voice had been robbed of strength due to the strenuous campaign trail. After 4:00 a.m., Carter claimed victory at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta in front of five thousand cheering supporters.⁴ He was the first candidate to defeat an incumbent president in over forty years. Carter was also the first president-elect from the Deep South in over a century.⁵ Carter earned 50.1% of the popular vote, compared to Ford's 48%, winning 297 electoral votes compared to Ford's 240. This was an election in which eighty million American people participated. The results could have been easily reversed if ten thousand Democratic voters in Ohio and Hawaii had switched their ballots to Ford. Political experts have deemed two reasons Ford did not win the election of 1976. The first reason was Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon after the Watergate scandal; the second was his debate gaffe on Eastern Europe. However, Carter's post-election survey showed that no more than two percent of voters cited Nixon as a reason that they did not vote for Ford. Other factors came into play: Carter's popularity, his messages, and the formidable Carter team of Jimmy and Rosalynn that shook the American roots and allowed the voters to see a change in the governmental structure. ⁶ Carter's solid morals and their close bond to champion issues created a

³ Ford, Gerald. “President Gerald Ford's Remarks on the Presidential Election Results and Telegram Congratulating President-Elect Jimmy Carter on His Victory,” (Ann Arbor, MI: Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum).

⁴“From the Archives: Jimmy Carter Speaks after 1976 Presidential Election Win,” Accessed From CBS News, *YouTube video*, 8:11, May 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrbeVmCV38I>.

⁵ The Deep South refers to the southern most states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

⁶ Daniel K. Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical: Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and the Presidential Contest of 1976*(Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 334-335.

new framework of American political ideology. They challenged Americans to seek a more traditional yet progressive lifestyle of American values. They pushed Americans to think outside the box and challenge the norms to create a progressive society based on the foundational roots of American principles.

On January 20, 1977, as a man of the people, Jimmy Carter stepped out of his black limousine, took Rosalynn's hand, and walked from the Capitol to the White House. There were waves of applause as the President, his First Lady, and their family began walking to the White House, shaking off the imperial notion of the Presidency and bringing it back into the hands of the American people. Jimmy had just taken the oath of office when America desired a return to the honest, fundamental principles of the American government. He kept his inauguration address short and poignant. Carter reminded Americans they needed a sense of remembered history, pulling together strength from the nation's diversity and moral values. "Ours was the first society openly to define itself in terms of both spirituality and human liberty. It is that unique self-definition which has given us an exceptional appeal, but it also imposes on us a special obligation, to take on those moral duties which, when assumed, seem invariably to be in our own best interests. You have given me a great responsibility – to stay close to you, to be worthy of you, and to exemplify what you are. Let us create together a new national spirit of unity and trust. Your strength can compensate for my weakness, and your wisdom can help to minimize my mistakes."⁷ Next, Carter focused on concerns that impacted Americans. While on the campaign trail, Carter addressed these significant issues that he noted in his inauguration address. These issues included human rights, environmental quality, nuclear arms control, and the search for justice and peace. On Inauguration Day, he focused primarily on the potential

⁷ "Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter," (Atlanta, GA: Jimmy Carter Library).

energy shortage and energy supplies. He also asked American citizens to depend on themselves for their needs and to stop viewing the federal government as a handout or bottomless pit.

The walk to the White House symbolized Carter's and his administration's willingness to work with the American people. As the *New York Times* noted, "Mr. Carter's walk was seen as an attempt to dispense with the pageantry, to emphasize his outsider status and to appeal to working men and women. (He even temporarily shunned the playing of "Hail to the Chief.")"⁸ Carter's administration believed in their ability to make America a place where their livelihood could be sustained for future generations.⁹ Carter's campaign brought to the limelight his First Lady, Rosalynn. Rosalynn was a formidable figure who went on to be a driving force in his administration as she established herself as an amiable First Lady, equal to Jimmy in all aspects of her life. Rosalynn Carter was a dynamic force in the White House.

During the presidential election cycle of 1976, James Earl "Jimmy" Carter proclaimed his candidacy for the White House. As his name was announced as an official candidate, many Americans wondered who Jimmy was. Rosalynn became a valuable asset to Jimmy's 1976 campaign team. The country was emerging from the mire of the Watergate scandal and the Nixon/Ford years. She understood that the American people's confidence needed to be restored. While campaigning for her husband during the 1976 election cycle, she developed a standard speech that won over the American people who had lost confidence in the government. She spoke on her husband's rural roots, his work as governor of Georgia, and how his status as an

⁸ Christine Hauser, "The Inaugural Parade, and the Presidents Who Walked It," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2017.

⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2013), 19-22.

outsider would bring about positive change.¹⁰As First Lady, Rosalynn championed an equitable working relationship between the President and First Lady. Carter relied on his wife's input and counsel.

Jimmy knew what issues he was passionate about, but his engineering background made his vocabulary more complex; Rosalynn would help edit his correspondences. When expressing his vocabulary, Rosalynn told Jimmy to talk to the American people like he was talking to her.¹¹ On the road, she proved to be almost as relatable as Jimmy. She told stories of how they scrimped and saved as a married couple. When she said these life stories, Rosalynn tugged on the heartstrings of the American people; she was gifted in presenting Jimmy and herself as average citizens. She knew how to win over a crowd and relate how Jimmy's solutions could solve America's problems. The *New York Times* noted, "She speaks, without notes, in the same slightly flat Georgia accent as her husband's, has the same quick, if less toothy, smile, and displays the same ambitious drive, religious feeling and almost mystical belief in the efficacy of hard work. She is intensely loyal to her husband and it is in the face of criticism of him that her wide hazel eyes seem to perform that same transformation as his blue ones, from crinkling friendliness to icy opprobrium."¹²

Campaigning and working side by side with her husband allowed Rosalynn to assist in assigning posts for females within Carter's administration. Rosalynn earned more equitable relations for women in the Carter administration. She brought the position of the First Lady to an equal status to the President of the United States. Through their private and professional

¹⁰ Scott Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter: Equal Partner in the White House* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 28.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 31.

¹² Wayne King, "Rosalynn Carter, a Tough, Tireless Campaigner, Displays Same Driving Quality as Her Husband," *The New York Times*, October 18, 1976.

relationship, many issues were raised and brought to the forefront of the political scene. Tax cuts, environmental issues, and human rights were some of the problems on their agenda. His biggest asset, however, was his wife, Rosalynn Carter, who helped guide him through his years in public service and the White House. Her role as First Lady was once compared to Eleanor Roosevelt, as noted by *Time* magazine on December 13, 1976: “Rosalynn Carter may well turn out to be an active presidential wife in the mold of Eleanor Roosevelt, her heroine.”¹³ Just like Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosalynn took the initiative in the White House and played an active role in policy and legislative agendas in the nation. Eleanor Roosevelt paved the way for the First Lady and played an active role by giving speeches and writing a newspaper column, but she was still not seen as an equal to her husband.

By the time the election cycle ended and transitions to the White House were made, Rosalynn proved to be an ample campaigner on the scene, and she proved to be a formidable asset to the administration in the capacity of the First Lady. Rosalynn changed the office of the First Lady significantly. She increased her media presence and grew in her activism. She developed an agenda of her own, which mainly consisted of five main programs: aid for the mentally handicapped, assistance for the elderly, volunteerism, childhood immunization, and championing for passage of the ERA.¹⁴ However, she was her husband’s partner in every sense of the word and was involved in his agenda. She received daily domestic and national security briefings, enabling her to discuss important matters with Jimmy while he worked on his legislative agenda. She maintained all the issues of a First Lady, expanded her role by sitting in

¹³ “Rosalynn Carter,” *National Museum of American History*, accessed June 18, 2023, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/first-ladies/rosalynn-carter>.

¹⁴ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 28.

on cabinet meetings, and helped her husband in the Executive Office of the United States.¹⁵ He placed her in a position of power within his cabinet.

While in the office of the First Lady, the Carters had a working lunch every Tuesday at twelve-thirty in the afternoon in the White House.¹⁶ This maneuver was the first for a president and his wife, as they met to discuss policy and legislative matters in a council session. This working session was a time to discuss personnel, pet projects, campaign strategy, foreign policy, and any other issues of importance. Rosalynn was on the move; she traveled constantly to eighteen nations and twenty-seven American cities in the first year alone; when she was at home, she was at work in the East Wing every day. She was also the first First Lady to have her professional policy staff. She was committed to equal pay for equal work and noticed that East Wing employees were all paid much less than their West Wing counterparts. She complained to Jimmy, who was way too cheap to do anything about it until she insisted that he do something about it, and it was changed.

Rosalynn's popularity as First Lady compensated for some of Jimmy's shortcomings. She did not exaggerate, correct grammar, or forget to say thank you. Most of Jimmy's aides would get Rosalynn to relay messages to Jimmy with a dose of realism that he would most of the time overlook. Administration officials both feared and respected her and called her "Steel Magnolia," which she didn't mind. *The Press Democrat* noted, "A devout Baptist and mother of four, she was diminutive and outwardly shy, with a soft smile and softer Southern accent. That was the "magnolia." She also was a force behind Jimmy Carter's rise from peanut farmer to the winner

¹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 34.

¹⁶ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 28.

of the 1976 presidential election. That was the “steel.”¹⁷ When Jimmy entered the residence every night, Rosalynn greeted him with a policy question outside their weekly lunch. The press could not understand why Rosalynn attended cabinet meetings. Still, the Carters overlooked this matter and continued functioning as a team and working for the betterment of the American people. She was not an active participant; she sat along the walls, listened to the meetings, and spoke to Jimmy about what had happened in them. She could attend all the sessions except the National Security Meetings because she did not have that high-level code word clearance.¹⁸

This dissertation examines the Carters’ relationship and the moral principles that guided them in establishing an American political system. How did Rosalynn make her office a main branch of the Executive branch? Rosalynn played a crucial role in making decisive decisions with Carter. She sat in on his daily cabinet meetings, which expanded her role as First Lady and created a partnership of equality between her and the President of the United States. How did Jimmy Carter’s moral undertone establish a new political system based on traditional principles and a fresh take from a Washington outsider? How did the bond between Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, from an intimate to a professional standpoint, build a system between the office of the Presidency and the First Lady that has withstood the test of future generations by enhancing the two offices?

This dissertation answers various questions. The question of who James Earl “Jimmy” Carter and his wife Rosalynn Carter were runs through the veins of this paper. Why are they so significant to the American public, and how did their moral compass create a unique political system? The moral compass is outlined through their influences based on their family, teachers,

¹⁷ Bill Barrow, “Rosalynn Carter: Advocate for Jimmy Carter and Many Others, Always Leveraging Her Love of Politics,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, November 20, 2023.

¹⁸ Jonathan Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, a Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 309-310.

Navy instructors, faith, relationship with one another, and life experiences. To tell the narrative is one thing, but the ultimate goal is to connect the issue of who Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were and what they did that was so important for America's political and social climate. The techniques they used through their equal partnership of professional and private marital bonds were trust and compassion for one another. Since the campaign will be examined, a point of reference that will be mentioned and noted will be the impact that Rosalynn had on the campaign of 1976, the tactics she used to help attract voters, and how she proved to be a formidable political supporter for Jimmy Carter. The experiences of Jimmy Carter in the White House will also be examined, as how he handled the domestic and foreign crises during his time in office. By reviewing the Carter years through the lens of how his bond with Rosalynn and his influences shaped his career in Washington, the reader will be able to form conclusions on how Jimmy Carter's years in the White House were substantial in creating a new political and social climate for the American people that is still seen in today's society. All these questions will be answered later in the subsequent chapters. Then, through the White House years, the question of how the Carter administration influenced the government remained.

Narratives are fascinating when they pertain to the Carters, especially since Jimmy Carter is still alive, and stories unfold daily, even though Rosalynn Carter just passed away. Much scholarship has been written about the Carters' connection and their life, both professionally and privately. In primary scholarship, the Carters have left the world an abundance of work about their private and professional life. Jimmy Carter wrote over thirty books, and Rosalynn Carter wrote twenty-six, leaving a legacy of their lives and works for the American public to read. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter have autobiographies that provide insight into how they grew up in Plains, Georgia, their home-spun traditional values, and how they lived into adulthood. This

insight into their private lives and personal feelings, how they grew up, and the people and life experiences who made them into the man and woman they are today. They also published a book telling their side of the story on each issue they stood for, whether on the campaign trail or while in office. This gave historians a wide array of primary resources when referencing their work. In the archives at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, there is a vast wealth of first-hand accounts of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter from their private and professional accounts of their lives.

Regarding secondary sources, a vast array of literature has been written on the Carters from their autobiographies, issues, and time in the White House. Historians have noted the fascination with the small-town politician from Georgia. His rise to political stardom in the White House and his policies, but little work has been done on the connection between Jimmy and Rosalynn and their professional accomplishments together. This is where this dissertation falls. The list of references tells how Jimmy and Rosalynn's morality impacted the American public, whether it is a personal or secondhand account of the Carter legacy, and how it can be translated for future historians' interpretations.

In his book *Keeping Faith Memoirs of a President*, Jimmy Carter wrote about Rosalynn's influence in his life.¹⁹ In this account, he detailed how important Rosalynn was to him during his life, campaign, and White House years. Carter started his writing by telling how Rosalynn helped him plan his Inauguration Day. By walking from Capitol Hill to the White House, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter showed their strength and relatability to the American public. He also told how Rosalynn Carter helped him write and rewrite his inaugural speech. From there, Jimmy Carter details their life in the White House and focuses on how Rosalynn Carter helped influence him in

¹⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2013).

the executive office. He stated that Rosalynn Carter made daily speeches, conducted news conferences, and appeared on interview shows. He explained how Rosalynn Carter received detailed domestic and national security briefings. However, those briefings did not contain sensitive security matters; Jimmy Carter gave a first-hand account of the inner workings of his and Rosalynn's life together, both privately and professionally, and how they worked to achieve their legislative agenda. Also, throughout Jimmy Carter's work, he provided a candid account of his time in the Oval Office and the extension of the policies he created as President. This included the creation of jobs for women in government. He championed women's rights and added more women to his cabinet and other positions of power around his administration, which his predecessors had never done. The book also glimpses Carter's private life, which allows the reader to see his personal beliefs and values and why Jimmy Carter saw things in the light that he did. This was important for examining why Jimmy Carter approached a particular issue and took a stance on an issue the way he did. His morals were built in his traditional upbringing and the foundational roots of small-town living.

Jimmy Carter's *A Full Life Reflections at Ninety* showed his life story and how Rosalynn Carter influenced his life.²⁰ Jimmy Carter wrote about his life growing up and how his young life shaped his values and morals. He led into how his thinking would later affect his domestic and international policies. He discussed the racism that was felt in the deep Jim Crow south towns of Plains and Archery, Georgia, part of the daily life that he experienced growing up, but something he later realized needed to be eradicated from the vocabulary of the South. He also talked about his time in the Navy, his life during the rituals, and the educational aspects of schooling in Annapolis, Maryland. When he went on to be a nuclear engineer in the Navy and told tales of his

²⁰ Jimmy Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

experiences there, he said he was dedicated to improving people's lives at home and around the world with Rosalynn Carter by his side. Jimmy Carter reflected on the marriage story and the bond between him and Rosalynn, which worked privately and professionally. This partnership allowed equity in the marriage and paved the way for equality in the professional field. By allowing so, the issue of women's rights was centered as a priority of the domestic agenda; they championed a better day where women could have equal rights as men in the professional field. Throughout Carter's work, he reiterated what he was most proud of throughout his years of life and what he might have done differently. Jimmy Carter, like the Renaissance man he was, mentioned all his various careers and how they affected him and Rosalynn Carter throughout the years. Jimmy Carter was also quick to note the presidents who had succeeded him, the world leaders, the passions he cared most about, and the status of how he thought they were currently doing.

Rosalynn Carter wrote the book *First Lady from Plains*. This autobiographical book covers her life from her childhood in Plains, Georgia, to her time as First Lady. It covered some of her passionate activism topics of mental health, caregiving, early childhood immunization, human rights, and conflict resolution. Rosalynn Carter stated she had two primary goals to live up to: her father's expectations and her escape from Plains, Georgia. She achieved both. This book told of her run with her husband through his political careers in the gubernatorial and Presidential races. ²¹

²¹ Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

Jimmy Carter's *A Call To Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* explained his stance on women's rights, which he carried throughout his life.²² Jimmy Carter was driven to write this book at the request of multiple religious leaders, calling out women being discriminated against in every nation, not just the United States of America. He derived this notion from the facts that women all over the world are "owned" by men, forced to suffer servitude, forced into child marriages, or ravaged in other ways as their rights are taken away from them. Women, statistically speaking, tend to be the most vulnerable, either trapped by war or violence. He stated throughout his book that women were abused and deprived of equal opportunities, owned by men, forced to suffer servitude, and forced into child labor. Jimmy Carter investigated the experiences of women by looking at the growing tolerance of violence and warfare and false interpretation of selected religious texts. He showed that key verses of religious text are often misquoted to suit the male agenda or key verses left out by male leaders to exalt the status of men and exclude the admittance of women in higher authority of affairs. He countered these claims by drawing upon his experiences with women to show that all women should be equal. Carter also used the testimony of women from all regions and religious backgrounds to draw on references that women should have equal rights not just here in America, and not just today, but all over the world and for the rest of time. Throughout his book, Jimmy Carter detailed that over half of all human beings are being denied equal rights and that something needs to be done about the situation. He noted that he and his wife Rosalynn had visited over 145 countries, and the Carter Center had active faculties in more than half of them for human/women's rights. Jimmy Carter also denoted that there was nothing to distinguish

²² Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2015).

between rich and poor countries when it came to dealing with women's rights. Both are on the same level when it comes to dealing with the abuse of women, and both need to strive to make gains in the activism of making women equal partners in the field of professional and basic human beings.

Secondary sources have been written about Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter and their contribution to American society, such as Scott Kaufman's book, *Rosalynn Carter Equal Partner in the White House*, highlighting the connections between Jimmy and Rosalynn's bond.²³ Since they were equal partners in their private relationships and professional working environments. Rosalynn Carter revolutionized the role of the First Lady. Nicknamed the "Steel Magnolia," she took on roles in the executive branch that many critics found inappropriate for the time. Kaufman showed how Rosalynn Carter helped her husband form his legislative agenda by serving as an ambassador on international trips. She discussed substantial issues with foreign officials, sat in cabinet meetings, testified before Congress, and was a sounding board for her husband's speeches. Kaufman showed how this role of the First Lady was controversial at the time, as none of her predecessors had completed such an active role with the executive branch and with the President in the White House. While in the White House, Rosalynn Carter did not scrimp on her fundamental issues. She took on the critical role of advocating for the mentally ill and their caregivers. Kaufmann balanced the notions of the feminists who believed that Rosalynn Carter had failed to take their interests to heart by treading on her bond with her husband and leaning on him for strength. Kaufman challenged the readers to see a politically savvy, talented woman who

²³Scott Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter: Equal Partner in the White House*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007.

pursued an ambitious agenda on her own and an agenda for her husband, the President, as his equal. He also noted the critics of Carter's Presidency who deemed they fell short in their fight and their promises for women's rights. Kaufman shows the dynamic lady behind President Carter, who helped mold the institution of the First Lady into the modern form and brought women into the judicial and executive branches of government.

Jonathan Alter's *His Very Best Jimmy Carter: A Life* showed how Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter grew up and gained their traditional values.²⁴ Jimmy Carter was essentially the only president who lived in what was like three centuries. His early life on the farm in the 1920s without electricity or the comforts of modern life, his presidency, which placed him in the center of significant events of the twentieth century, such as the Cold War, and his efforts to help global health initiatives placed him on the stage of the twentieth century. Alter used archival sources to tell the story of the life of Jimmy Carter, who was born in Plains, Georgia, and grew up on a farm in Archery, Georgia, one of the meanest counties in the Jim Crow South. Alter mentioned he idolized his father's hard work of learning all the skills needed to become a well-rounded farmer. This lesson allowed Jimmy Carter to become a more knowledgeable politician. Jimmy Carter appointed people around him of all backgrounds to political offices. Alter detailed Jimmy Carter's mother as a loving and caring woman who overlooked race and class to care for her patients. She passed on this trait to Jimmy Carter as he learned to care for all races and became a champion for equity for all races. The work also traced the rise of Jimmy Carter from a shy boy on the farm through his naval nuclear engineer phase in life, his marriage bond to Rosalynn, a peanut farmer and civic leader in his small town, and his rise in Georgia politics, which led to a presidential run. Alter stated that some of Jimmy Carter's impressive successes in the White

²⁴ Jonathan Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, a Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

House were in engineering peace between Israel and Egypt, amassing a historic environmental record, moving the government from tokenism to diversity, setting a new global standard for human rights, and normalizing relations with China. After leaving office, his achievements did not stop; he worked to eradicate diseases, built houses for the poor, and taught Sunday school until he was late in age. Jimmy Carter was a Renaissance Man who was underrated for his time and had a vision of telling the truth to the American public. This book denotes the tale of the Carters and their role through the political ladder, both domestically and internationally.

Stuart E. Eizenstat's *President Carter: The White House Years* detailed the biographical accounts of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, the campaign years, and their influence in the White House.²⁵ This was a firsthand account from Jimmy Carter's Chief Domestic Policy adviser. He gave the background of where Jimmy Carter came from and insight into what made the 39th President of the United States. Throughout the biographical sketch, Eizenstat showed perceptions of the integrity and values that ground Jimmy Carter's morality. These later became part of Jimmy Carter's foreign and domestic policy. He also wrote about Rosalynn Carter and told how instrumental of a character she was on the campaign trail. He stated that Rosalynn Carter showed how much of an asset she was by not only taking care of Jimmy Carter's domestic needs but how she worked endlessly to push Jimmy Carter's legislative agenda. This book denotes a firsthand account of Carter's White House journey from conception through his term.

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were political sources of support for one another, denoted in E. Stanly Godbold, Jr.'s *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, the Georgia Years, 1924-1974*.²⁶ The book

²⁵ Stuart Eizenstat and Madeleine Korbel Albright, *President Carter: The White House Years* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2020).

²⁶ E. Stanly Godbold, *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter: The Georgia Years, 1924-1974* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

described the bond they formed both politically and professionally. Godbold drew on academic and military records, governor's correspondences, interviews with the Carters themselves, and interviews with people in Carter's life, both public and private. He covered their lives from childhood to the end of the Georgia governorship, with particular attention to Rosalynn Carter as the First Lady of Georgia. Paying attention to how Rosalynn Carter was raised and how she ran the governorship of Georgia was important because this was how she shaped her political agenda and political mannerisms when she ran with her husband in the 1976 election and then took on the White House. Godbold gave a biographical approach to the Carters as they grew up in Georgia, portraying a man who was far more than just a peanut farmer. A man who strived in business, the navy, and later politics in the state legislature and the Georgia governorship. A man who leaned on his wife for strength and claimed she was the most influential person in his life. The two created a special bond built on trust that allowed them to tackle the campaign of 1976 and a term in the White House. This author tells the story of the relationship between Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in the historical scope of private and professional bonds that worked to help the American public.

The scholarship of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter had led many to challenge the notion that equity in a relationship was not possible. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were married in Plains, Georgia, on July 7, 1946. They formed a private bond that lasted decades and a professional working relationship that has stood the trial and tribulations of running for Georgia state legislature, a one-term Georgia Governor, and ultimately, President of the United States.²⁷ This dissertation examines the story of the bond between Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter from their roots to the present day. From their bond, the examination encompassed how Rosalynn Carter

²⁷ Alter, *His Very Best*, 67.

campaigns for Jimmy Carter across the country in the 1976 presidential election cycle, ultimately becoming a formidable asset to the campaign. Through their equity of a relationship on the campaign trail, the White House years have flourished as Rosalynn Carter continued to expand her political savvy into the role of the First Lady. Ultimately, through their bond, their morals encompassed a new political trajectory for the American nation, bringing the American people's confidence out of past scandals.

The following chapters will outline this dissertation's focus. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, through their professional working relationship, created an equitable bond that challenged the moral fibers of the American people. Each chapter will be unique to a particular cause in the timeline of events that the Carters experienced during their relationship story. The beginning of their story was nestled in their traditional roots. As their lives changed and matured, they formed a closer relationship to create a partnership that championed the progressiveness of America. This dissertation will outline how the Carters fulfilled each of these steps. It will look inside into how the Carters thought and projected their private, moralistic relationship into a professional working environment through the campaign trail of 1976 into the White House. With Rosalynn's help, Jimmy Carter became one of the most progressive Presidents of the time. Still, history forgot to tell the story due to the political blunders of other societal and international affairs during his Presidency. This is one area that history could reevaluate regarding the Carter administration to discover that maybe he was not one of the worst presidents in history on the social and political front.

To explain the basis of the whole dissertation, many have to question who James Earl "Jimmy" Carter was and what was so significant about him. The dissertation will answer this in chapter two, "Life in Plains, Georgia." Chapter Two will examine the early years of Jimmy

Carter. Jimmy Carter was born on October 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia, with 550 people. Jimmy Carter grew up in the deeply segregated southern town of Archery, where discrimination based on skin tone was everyday life to him.²⁸ Carter grew up on his family's farm that held 350 acres (about half the area of Central Park in New York City) and employed five sharecroppers. The main cash crop on the family farm was peanuts, which was still being produced heavily when Carter took over after his dad died. This chapter aims to show Carter's lifestyle, working on his father's farm and going to school. While showing a pattern and understanding of where Carter came from and the actions he took, it will give a better look at how he reacted politically and socially when relating to the American voters. By focusing on his early beginnings until the time he entered the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, Carter's family background and values showed where Carter came from and the sense of family roots that Carter grew up with. Looking at the values his mother and father instilled in him, one will get the sense of duty and responsibility that stayed with Carter throughout the campaign trail and his years in the White House. Carter was a man who was truthful and never strayed from his morals and principles.

This dissertation would be nothing without Rosalynn Carter. She had a significant impact on Jimmy Carter. To denote that impact, one would have to discuss Rosalynn, who she was, and what was so important about her. This third chapter will focus on Rosalynn Carter and how her early life in Plains, Georgia, influenced her upbringing. It will be entitled "A Girl from the Wrong Side of the Tracks." Rosalynn, unlike Jimmy, grew up in a very different lifestyle. She experienced poverty. However, many historians would denote that she did not let poverty define her, nor did her family. Her parents both worked and stressed religion and education equally. These two factors would also stick with Rosalynn Carter even to her adult years and would factor

²⁸ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 17.

into decisions when she accepted Jimmy's proposal. Her lifestyle was affected when her father passed. She became a co-provider in the house and cared for the family physically and monetarily.²⁹ Rosalynn Carter never let this stop her from pursuing any dream that she may have had. This may have taught her perseverance. Rosalynn Carter had to become what her family needed, and the ability to adapt and overcome any situation became prevalent when she married Jimmy Carter and became a Navy wife. This chapter will show the evolution of Rosalynn Carter from a child into the bonds of matrimony with Jimmy Carter. It will show how she gained her values from both parents and the skill of adaptability once her father died.

Once Jimmy Carter decided to run during the presidential election cycle of 1976, Rosalynn stepped into her own and found her strength as a formidable asset. Chapter four, entitled "The Election of 1976", describes the entirety of the election cycle of 1976 and how Rosalynn Carter stepped onto the campaign trail for Jimmy Carter and championed votes for her husband. The election of 1976 was a change in American principles. It saw a shift in the moral fibers of the nation. As the country emerged from political scandal/corruption, society was progressively moving forward in new directions. Incumbent Gerald Ford was challenged by his party, who sought to see if his political blunders would be costly to the party or if the nation could solidify behind him again. The Democratic Party saw an uptick in challengers during the election cycle, as candidates were fighting to fill the political vacuum in Washington, D.C. Ultimately, the underdog and political outsider, Jimmy Carter, appealed to the voters through his moral, unscathed, corrupt appeal. Ford and Carter challenged one another on issues of the day in various capacities that resonated with the people. However, the techniques that they used in campaigning were highlighted in very different ways. Ford stayed off the campaign trail, using

²⁹ Kaufman, Rosalynn Carter, 5.

the office of the presidency to campaign, and Carter appealed to the people based on the average American citizen. It was the techniques that the candidates used that helped influence the outcome of the election, along with their stance on the issues—the power behind the deliverance of the message. Rosalynn Carter was one of the driving forces that got the votes out for Carter. Rosalynn Carter had to overcome shyness to participate in press conferences and interviews during Jimmy Carter’s campaign. She also visited and spoke at mental hospitals and grocery stores to make her husband’s policies known and listened as the voters voiced their concerns for the next voting cycle. She listened to Carter’s speeches, was a sounding board for new ideas, and wrote correspondences for him. She liked to help write his speeches and to help plan his campaign strategies for different states he would visit during future weeks and months. She was not afraid to challenge her husband on personal issues either. Jimmy was loyal to a fault and believed loyalty was a vital skill. He trusted people more than his wife did. Rosalynn Carter felt she had a better sense of who could be trusted.³⁰ Rosalynn Carter also appealed to the average voter on a personal level. She used her speeches to touch their hearts and appeal to their everyday life as moms, wives, or human beings. She appealed to who they were as American citizens, which was what the people sought. This chapter will examine the techniques Rosalynn Carter used in her speeches, interviews, and mannerisms while on the campaign trail for her husband during the election cycle in 1976. This chapter will show how she proved an asset to her husband and championed issues he cared about by relating them to the American public.

The Carter team was assembled once the Carters stormed the White House. Just like on the campaign trail, the transition from the campaign to the office of the First Lady proved to be a smooth one for Rosalynn Carter. Chapter Five, entitled “A Formidable First Lady,” this

³⁰ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 27.

dissertation will show Rosalynn Carter's influence on the First Lady's position in the White House. As First Lady of the White House, Rosalynn Carter expanded the position of the office to be an equal partnership with her husband, the President of the United States. Women were still challenged with the idea of being subservient to their husbands. Even with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, women were still not deemed equal to men in some sectors. There were still traditional gender stereotypes that women should be in the home with the children and men were the breadwinners. Women had to fight for their rights since the days of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Regarding First Ladies, two in particular had expanded on their roles in the White House, Edith Wilson and Eleanor Roosevelt. Edith Wilson ran the White House while her husband was down with a stroke. Eleanor Roosevelt expanded her role as she wrote articles and completed passion projects. Rosalynn Carter came through and broke more barriers for future First Ladies to come. She completed interviews, press conferences, and ambassador trips as the First Lady of the United States; however, she expanded the role due to his need for counsel. She sat in on cabinet meetings and kept up Carter's legislative agenda. Rosalynn Carter questioned her husband regarding his policy, and he sought answers from her when he needed advice. Rosalynn Carter received detailed briefings from his domestic and international security staff, not anything about national security, but things that would help him and her in conversations when he needed to discuss things to help form his opinions on a subject.³¹ This way, the two could have open and honest conversations about policy topics and lean on one another regarding counsel and advice. This helped strengthen their professional bond and helped show that women could work in a professional setting and provide meaningful input to society in the governmental and political framework of the nation. Rosalynn

³¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 34.

Carter was more than just a party thrower or a hostess to foreign dignitaries. She helped Carter run the White House during his administration and gave a voice to thousands of women who had not had one for so long. Rosalynn Carter was a supporter of the ERA or the Equal Rights Amendment. The Equal Rights Amendment was first proposed in 1923, which guarantees equal rights under the law for all persons regardless of sex. This was a push to make sure that women were seen as equals to men.³² Rosalynn Carter supported this as she had been working on an equal footing with her husband in both a private and professional way throughout their entire marriage. This is something that she championed during her time in the White House. Rosalynn Carter discussed this issue with Carter to make women more equitable to men. Jimmy Carter had not yet had an opportunity to appoint a person to the Supreme Court, but he had appointed 262 nominations to the federal benches. Which was a record number at the time. He and Rosalynn Carter tried to balance the line regarding race, ethnicity, and gender. His most famous appointee was in 1980 when Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Washington, D.C. Circuit. She later served as a Supreme Court Justice. She graduated from Cornell and Columbia Law School, having served as the director of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project, where she argued gender equity cases at the Supreme Court. Ginsburg did not argue solely for women. Her most famous case fought for the basis of the equity of men. She argued that armed forces should pay civilian husbands of military personal living allowances and widowers should receive Social Security benefits to care for their children.³³ Without Carter taking notice of Ginsburg's work, the face of the Supreme Court and the historical nature of

³² "The Equal Rights Amendment," *Equal Rights Amendment*, accessed January 14, 2024, <https://www.equalrightsamendment.org/the-equal-rights-amendment>.

³³ "RBG: Jimmy Carter's 'Notorious' Judicial Legacy," *UVA Engagement*, accessed June 1, 2023, <https://engagement.virginia.edu/learn/2020/09/24/rbg-jimmy-carters-notorious-judicial-legacy>.

cases throughout time would have been drastically different. Carter had the misfortune of being the first president in American history not to fill a single seat on the Supreme Court. He was expected to name Shirley Hufstедler, a widely known federal judge from California, but she was named the first Secretary of Education in 1979.³⁴ One of Rosalyn Carter's passion projects was mental health. She was very vocal about the stigma of how mental health patients should be handled and cared for. She discussed how they should not be hidden away in overcrowded, dangerous facilities, and she worked to create a major overhaul in the mental health community. She would serve as the honorary chair of the President's Commission on Mental Health, which led to the creation of the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980. Rosalynn Carter would also testify before Congress on the issue of mental health and addiction.³⁵ This chapter will shed light on how Rosalynn Carter transformed the office of the First Lady and how she helped shape the Carter administration to empower women and influence Jimmy Carter in his policies.

Chapter Six, entitled "Jimmy and the White House," will examine the White House years of Jimmy Carter after his election of 1976. A fiscally conservative president, it will focus on how Jimmy Carter used his morals to readjust the principles of the American political structure once in office domestically and internationally. Being president during rising energy costs, mounting inflation, and increasing world crisis, Carter had to respond to the growing unrest in the American public for change. Carter refocused U.S. foreign policy toward human rights. He also continued Nixon's conciliatory Cold War policies towards normalizing relations with China. He further pursued Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the Soviet Union and was responsible for the Camp David Accords. Carter was also a part of adding more women to his positions of power

³⁴ Alter, *His Very Best*, 315.

³⁵ "Rosalynn Carter on the Mental Health Crisis," Rosalynn Carter On The Mental Health Crisis, *JFK Library*.

and adding positions to his cabinet. The Carter White House has gotten a bad reputation from the public for not doing enough for the American people. However, when taking a closer examination, Carter was very progressive in his tactics for advancing the American public.

To wrap up this dissertation, chapter seven will formulate the paper's conclusion. The conclusion will spark other areas or questions for debate for the reader. The dissertation aims to show that Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were a force of political nature, grasped from the traditional roots of their upbringing, molded together, and forced to work through the political and social climates of the day, championing moral fibers of the American political structure. It will also examine how Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter expanded on their principal passions from the White House years into lasting legacies outside the White House. The conclusion will leave the reader asking questions and leading them into their research areas for future endeavors. However, it will answer the following questions: who Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were, and why were they so significant in creating a moral change in the American political structure? What did they achieve in the Carter administration that affected the American public not only for their administration but for the rest of time?

Carter made a run for reelection in 1980. However, he was unsuccessful in his run against Republican Ronald Reagan. The country was divided on the issues of Carter and his political workings of the government. The government was going through inflation, recession, high gas prices, and a foreign crisis with the Iran hostage affair. The campaign promises and the moral ground that Carter campaigned on in 1976 did not work during the election cycle of 1980. Americans wanted a politician who would restore balance and get them out of the political mess they were in domestically and internationally. They were ready for a change of regime and mindset once again.

While many historians are just learning the truth behind how much Rosalynn Carter influenced Jimmy Carter throughout his administration, this dissertation will help fill the missing historical narratives. Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter were a political team that transformed the moral fibers of the political scheme of the American public through the extension of their professional working relationship founded on the bedrock of their marriage. At a time when women were just gaining economic freedom and becoming liberated, Rosalynn Carter was breaking boundaries and setting the stage for women across America to follow and aspire to be like. Through the love and capability of her husband, she was blazing political trails for future First Ladies of the United States and giving women in America dreams of political aspirations. Rosalynn was the driving force behind Jimmy Carter's efforts to improve relations among women and bring them out of the home and into the workforce. She advocated for an equal partnership between men and women that created equitability in the line of professionalism. More women were given a voice through the progressive maneuvers of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter. The dissertation will encapsulate all the emotions and timelines of the relationship formed through Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter's private and professional bond, creating a bedrock foundation that benefited the American public.

Chapter 2

Life in Plains, Georgia

James Earl “Jimmy” Carter, the 39th President of the United States, faced the wrath of historians, being labeled one of the worst Presidents throughout history. What are the characteristics of a good President? Is it his upstanding moral compass, his unwavering posture under pressure, his ability to capture an audience, or his ability to stare down international pressures with poise and dignity? Each Presidential term faces the daunting task of the social and political climate of the world. Does the man make the office, or does the office make the man? Carter’s administration was wrought with international blunders. Americans were taken hostage at the embassy in Tehran, and domestic crises such as gasoline shortages, rising inflation, and increasing unemployment loomed over the Carter administration. Despite the blunders of Carter’s one term of Presidency, he still managed to preserve his Presidency with a solid moral compass. This moral compass was defined by his solid Southern Baptist faith that was instilled in him from his family unit, his perceptions of values that were instilled in him from his parents, teachers, and Navy instructors, and his strengthened bond with Rosalynn Carter that helped instill his character into the lives of those around him. Jimmy Carter learned the traditional values of humility, tolerance, equality, generosity, fairness, and social responsibility from his upbringing in Georgia and his time spent in the Navy. Establishing a sound moral fiber, he set the tone for a political career based on a general understanding of honesty and autonomy of rights for all Americans. Jimmy Carter wrote in a position paper on a Code of Ethics stating, “There is only one person in this nation who can speak with a clear voice, who can set a standard of morals, decency, and openness, who can spell out comprehensive policies and coordinate the efforts of different departments of government, who can call on the American people for

sacrifices and explain the purpose of that sacrifice and the consequences of it. That person is the President. The President ought to be personally responsible for everything that goes on in the Executive Branch of government, whether that be the appointment of major officials, the clear description of policy, the relationship of the Executive with Congress, the revelation of mistakes and mismanagement, if any, or violations of the law, should they occur, unfairness on the part of regulatory agencies and so forth.”¹ Carter took on socially and politically charged issues and polarized for the day. He supported issues such as human rights issues and women’s issues during his term in office. Carter was an average American citizen who took over the Presidency with a fresh new look and perspective. The road to how he added his perspectives started from his influences and upbringing in Georgia.

Jimmy Carter was born in the deeply segregated southern town of Plains, Georgia, population 550, on October 1, 1924. His family moved to the neighboring town of Archery, where he spent part of his childhood. Carter grew up on his father’s 360-acre farm, where he employed more than two hundred workers, and five black sharecropper families lived on his farm.² The house Carter grew up in was ordered from a Sears, Roebuck, and Company kit six years before they moved into it. There was no running water, electricity, or insulation. For heat, besides the kitchen stove, there were open fireplaces fueled by wood. There was no indoor restroom. For a bathroom, they relieved themselves in “slop jars” emptied in an outdoor toilet in the daylight. They drew water from the well until his father installed a windmill and ran a pipe from the tank to the kitchen and bathroom. Eventually, electricity was added in 1939.³ Growing

¹ Jimmy Carter, “Position Paper: ‘Jimmy Carter’s Code of Ethics,’” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/position-paper-jimmy-carters-code-ethics>.

² Kai Bird, *The Outlier: The Unfinished Presidency of Jimmy Carter* (Crown, 2022), 15.

³ Jimmy Carter, *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 7.

up during the Great Depression, the average American citizen lived an ordinary existence.

Jimmy loved the great outdoors. He played in the woods, hiked, fished, and loved baseball and tennis.

Carter's father held traditional segregationist views. He was a man that Carter later noted as a stern taskmaster and a man that everyone wanted to please, but was also his "best friend." He was a renaissance man, and Carter was inspired to be that later in his life. James Earl Carter Sr. was a merchant by trade. His talents included a farmer, forester, herdsman, blacksmith, carpenter, and shoemaker. He was a strict disciplinarian, and he rarely resorted to physical punishment. Carter noted, "I loved and admired him, and one of my preeminent goals in life was to earn his approbation. I learned to expect his criticism, always constructive, but his accolades were rare."⁴

Carter would write a poem after his father's passing that denotes his despise for his father's discipline. "This is a pain I mostly hide, but ties of blood, or seed, endure, and even now I feel inside the hunger for the outstretched hand, a man's embrace to take me in, the need for just a word of praise."⁵ His father instilled in Jimmy his lifelong love for religion. This influenced Jimmy's moral compass throughout his entire life. His father led the local Baptist church Sunday School lessons, took them on sleepovers, and instilled a sense of fun in the lessons, enticing the kids to want to learn the gospel. One time, James took the boys to a local grain mill for a sleepover, and after fishing and swimming, he read Saint Paul's letters to the Corinthians and urged them to be "ambassadors for Christ." James was also a stickler for telling

⁴ Carter, *A Full Life*, 13.

⁵ Jonathan Alter, "Jimmy on the Farm: How Jimmy Carter's relationship with his father shaped him." *OLD GOATS with Jonathan Alter*, February 25, 2023, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://oldgoats.substack.com/p/jimmy-on-the-farm>.

the truth. Carter noted that his basic integrity and contempt for not lying came from his father.⁶ James Sr. was a politician who served as a Democrat in the Georgia legislature because he wanted to protect the rural electrification system established under President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.⁷ President Carter's father instilled in him the spirit to work for your dreams. The ability to achieve one's goals is through hard work and a skill set. This followed Carter as he climbed the political ladder to the White House. Becoming a "Renaissance man" was an idea that stuck with Jimmy as he grew older. He wanted not only to accomplish the goals necessary to be successful in his field of choice, but he also wanted to expand his base to be helpful in the community, just like his father. Jimmy learned from his father how to capture the community's love, kindness, and respect as he expanded on how to give back to his community in every aspect. Carter was able to utilize and capitalize on his skills as a modern "Renaissance man." Carter's well-rounded views on multiple subjects and ability to reach numerous voters based on their interests served him well on his climb up the political ladder.

"Miz" Bessie Lillian Carter was Jimmy Carter's mother. She was a significant, influential character in Jimmy Carter's life. She provided him with an ethics compass throughout his life. She served as a nurse in the segregated Plains and Archery Georgia and instilled a robust moral code in Jimmy. At sixty-eight, Lillian served in the Peace Corps and a community hospital in India on the outskirts of Mumbai. Lillian Carter spent 21 months in Vikhroli, India, near Mumbai. Her assignment consisted of a family planning program, which included teaching women about contraception and men about vasectomy. She also volunteered to work in a clinic for factory workers.

⁶ Jonathan Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, a Life* (Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, a Cengage Company, 2021), 15-16.

⁷ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 17.

While in India, Lillian Carter worked with lepers, where she dealt with blood and human feces, which was considered by some “untouchable.” She also cleaned and cooked, which were often performed by servants in the Indian caste system.⁸ She played a role in Carter’s presidential campaign during the very early stages.⁹ The Guardian noted, “She was describing her emotions on the evening that Jimmy came into Madison Square Garden to accept the Democratic Party’s nomination. “I had such a feeling of awe that I wanted to weep. I believe it was the first time I realized what Jimmy was doing, and that if he were elected, he would be the most powerful man in the world. I had been so busy helping that I had never thought about it. But that time I said, Oh Lord this is the truth. That is my son.””¹⁰ Being from the segregated south, Lillian saw the unequal treatment of blacks and whites on an up-close basis. She never dealt with or treated any of her patients unequally and instilled in Jimmy the qualities of never treating anybody differently, no matter their race, color, or creed. She had the strength to defy conventions during the racially charged South to treat blacks the same as whites in the community through her nursing skills. She believed that social justice was necessary for greatness in nursing. She would treat her black patients in their homes and welcome them into her home, even allowing them to enter through the front door rather than the back, which was the custom.

Jimmy Carter remembers the tireless dedication of his mother, as he would sometimes go a week without seeing her. She believed it was her obligation to help others who were in need.

⁸ Fran Roberts Willard, “Lillian Carter, Rosalynn Carter, and Caregiving,” *Proceedings* (Baylor University Medical Center), July 2011.

⁹ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 18.

¹⁰ Steele, Jonathan. "My Name's Miss Lillian, and My Boy's Running for President: Jimmy Carter Grew Up in the Small Town Atmosphere of Plains, Georgia: Population 638. Jonathan Steele Meets His Mother Who Still Lives there." *The Guardian*, 1976 Oct 23, 1976.

He admired and was inspired by this trait in his mother.¹¹ She also never looked down on someone if they couldn't pay for services. Because she practiced during the Great Depression, Lillian often worked 20-hour days for around \$6 a day, but most of her patients were cash-poor and could not afford to pay. She often worked out a deal with her patients for payment using other methods, such as chickens, eggs, pigs, or chores around the house. Carter saw the art of compromise and learned how to deal with people early on. All skills that would help him later in life.¹²

Jimmy attended Plains High School, where he met another influential person, Miss Julia Coleman, his teacher. Carter quoted her after being sworn in as President, "As my high school teacher, Miss Julia Coleman used to say, 'We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles.'"¹³ Coleman taught English from seventh through eleventh (the last) grade. She began the school day with a half-hour mandatory chapel service that included not just Holy Scripture but also a piece of wisdom about the importance of thinking of the less fortunate. She assigned a minimum of thirty to forty pages of reading a night and "ready writing" contests, in which students had to complete essays in class in fifteen or thirty minutes. Carter credited this for writing out so many memos and books in a timely fashion later in life. She also focused on public speaking in her class; they would have debates every Friday. Jimmy was always well prepared but had trouble with halting delivery and projecting his voice. When Jimmy was in fifth grade, Miss Coleman pushed him to read *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. Jimmy assumed he would read about cowboys and Indians, but Miss Coleman subtly showed him the feudal social

¹¹ Fran Roberts Willard, "Lillian Carter, Rosalynn Carter, and Caregiving," *Proceedings (Baylor University. Medical Center)*, July 2011.

¹² Carter, *A Full Life*, 26.

¹³ Alter, *His Very Best*, 40.

structures of the American South by showing him Russian feudal society. Carter reread this book several times and came to note that this book's meaning was about how ordinary people can change history. He realized that for peace to exist, all humanity must strive for it relentlessly. One instance in Miss Coleman's class was interesting to note. She required her students to memorize the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling, on which they were tested. When explaining the line "If you can make one heap of all your winnings and risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss," she noted she didn't think of the gambler in the poem but of a political campaign. When Carter ran for the Georgia governor in 1970, one of his former classmates, Kathryn Bacon Maudlin, wrote that when Miss Coleman analyzed that line, "I thought her eyes rested on you as she looked around the room."¹⁴ While at Plains High School, Jimmy graduated Salutatorian with dreams of attending the U.S. Naval College.

The dream of the Navy was sparked by his uncle Tom Watson Gordy, who served in the Navy when Jimmy was growing up. He sent him postcards and scrimshaws of his travels from around the world, which fired up Jimmy's imagination. Jimmy wanted to be a sailor one day and a midshipman at Annapolis, just like his uncle. Jimmy's uncle was the catalyst for his start in his Navy career. The stories Gordy told intrigued young Carter. Jimmy was mesmerized by the various places Gordy had been and the magnificent sights he had beheld. This sparked Jimmy's interest in traveling and visiting beyond Plains, Georgia. His ultimate agenda throughout life was taking up human rights issues from the countries he visited.

Jimmy's dream of attending the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, did not immediately come to fruition. Jimmy was appointed to the school but could not start immediately. The spot had been promised to another student. Therefore, he studied engineering

¹⁴ Alter, *His Very Best*, 43.

at Georgia Southwestern Junior College, made the honor roll at Georgia Tech, and studied nuclear physics at Union College in Schenectady, New York. He physically trained for the Naval Academy. Due to his short stature and flat feet, he rolled his feet over Coca-Cola bottles to strengthen his arches and went on a diet full of bananas to bulk up.¹⁵ The Naval Academy proved to be an insightful year for Jimmy. The first thing that struck young Carter about the Naval Academy was *The Blue Jacket's Manual*. This was the academy's rule book, and he valued it so much that he held onto it long after graduation. Jimmy held onto several of the virtues of the manual long after his Navy career ended.

The manual is an introduction to the U.S. Navy and is a career-long reference work. It emphasizes warfighting, routines, administrative guidance, and standards of conduct.¹⁶ He clung to them not only in his personal life but also in his political career. "Those who serve in ships are expected to exhibit obedience, knowledge, fighting spirit, reliability, initiative, loyalty, self-control, energy, courage, justice, faith in ourselves, cheerfulness and honor, but above all comes absolute truth, the final test of a man."¹⁷ Annapolis tested Jimmy's wits and limits as it did all the other Plebs¹⁸ before him. Jimmy was put through the same hazing rituals and academic tests that previous generations had endured. Carter took them with his natural grace and ease.

Occasionally, he talked back to a superior, which caused him difficulty. Carter noted that during his studies, he never opened a book expecting to study. Carter eventually graduated from the Naval Academy and was assigned to Norfolk.

¹⁵Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 19.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Cutler et al., "'The Bluejacket's Manual, 26th Edition,'" *U.S. Naval Institute*, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.usni.org/press/books/bluejackets-manual-26th-edition-0>.

¹⁷ Alter, *His Very Best*, 53.

¹⁸ U.S. Military and Naval academies member of the freshman class.

During Jimmy's time at Annapolis, he found the love of his life, Miss Eleanor Rosalynn Smith, who impacted his personal and political career the most. Later, she became his wife. The two had known one another since Rosalynn was born, but it wasn't until an encounter after a church event that they introduced themselves. Carter noted it was a Sunday afternoon. He was riding down the road with his sister Ruth's boyfriend. He spotted Rosalynn on the steps of the Plains Methodist Church, where she was about to attend a youth meeting, and he got out to ask her to attend a movie, to which she agreed. Jimmy was smitten, and the next morning, he told his mother that she was the girl he would marry.¹⁹ The story continued that Miss Lillian was taken aback and said that the girl was too little, she was Ruth's friend, and he was too sophisticated for her. That she was from the "wrong side of the tracks." However, Jimmy insisted that Rosalynn was the one he would marry, and the entanglement between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law began.²⁰ Jimmy Carter wrote a poem entitled 'Rosalynn' in 1955 about his wife.

She'd smile, and birds would feel that they no longer
 Had to sing, or it may be I failed
 To hear their song.
 Within a crowd, I'd hope to glance might be
 For me, but I knew that she was shy, and wished
 To be alone.
 I'd pay to sit behind her, blind to
 What was on the screen, and watch the image flicker
 Upon her hair.
 I'd glow when her diminished voice would clear
 My muddled thoughts, like lightning flashing in
 A gloomy sky.
 The nothing in my soul with her aloof
 Was changed to foolish fullness when she came
 To be with me.
 With shyness gone and hair caressed with gray
 Her smile still makes the birds forget to sing

¹⁹ Carter, *A Full Life*, 38.

²⁰ Alter, *His Very Best*, 65.

And me to hear their song.²¹

Rosalynn was a painfully shy girl. Over the years, she morphed into a formidable, intelligent, charming, and equal life partner Jimmy described as the “perfect extension of myself.” Jimmy was twenty-one, and Rosalynn was eighteen when they sealed their vows with a ring. No invitations, attendants, or reception were part of the nuptials. When the pianist first played “Here Comes the Bride,” Jimmy and Rosalynn hadn’t yet arrived. They finally made it to the altar. The second go-around, they were betrothed to one another for a life neither knew was coming.

Once the Carters were married, life in the Navy ensued. Their first post was in Norfolk, but soon after, they relocated all over the United States. This tested Carter’s marriage; Jimmy worked long hours, and Rosalynn was left to take care of the house, and soon after that, the children came along. They formed a formidable, equal relationship, one that was built on trust and respect for one another. They trusted each other constantly and believed each other had their back. This bond became the cornerstone of their relationship while Jimmy ran for political office in Georgia and the White House. She was a partner who helped shape political ideas and policies that were integral to Jimmy’s legislative agenda and executive oversights.

While in the Navy, Jimmy met Admiral Hyman Rickover, who played an integral role in shaping him into a sharp, attentive young man. Carter applied for the new nuclear navy division. In the interview, Jimmy bragged that he was in the top 10 percent while in his naval academy days at Annapolis, Maryland. Admiral Rickover responded with, “Did you always do your best?” Jimmy explained to him that he did not. In response, the Admiral asked, “Why not?”²² This

²¹ Bethan Sexton For Dailymail.Com, “Jimmy Carter’s Poem to Wife Rosalynn in 1995: ‘She’d Smile and Birds Would Feel That They No Longer Had to Sing,’” *Daily Mail Online*, November 29, 2023, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12805095/Jimmy-Carter-poem-wife-Rosalynn.html>.

²² Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 20.

question and feeling of uncomfortableness stayed with Jimmy as he went through the Navy. He pushed himself harder and tried to analyze situations to new heights. Jimmy later used this event to catalyze his famous memoir *Why Not the Best?* Just like Admiral Rickover, Jimmy had climbed the ladder of success to the top. Admiral Rickover was born Chaim Godalia Rickover in Russian-controlled Poland into a Jewish family. The Admiral hated government waste, especially economic waste, a quality Jimmy had when he took office as Georgia's Governor and in the White House. He found ways to cut costs and save money wherever he could. The Admiral was also very passionate about his projects, a trait that Jimmy possessed. They were not ashamed of pushing forward in their projects until completion.²³ The Admiral was also no stranger to hard work and long hours, which Jimmy became accustomed to. Under the advisement of Rickover, Jimmy worked eighty-hour weeks, and Rickover would almost always work longer hours in a nearly superhuman way. Carter noted this and later said he had the same superhuman work ethic.

In April of 1953, six years after Jimmy had been in the Navy, he received a phone call from his cousin, Don Carter, telling him that his father was sick and might not survive. After tests at Emory Hospital in Atlanta, it was determined that Jimmy's father was terminally ill with pancreatic cancer. Jimmy requested two weeks' leave from his post and went to be with his father as he slowly passed away. Jimmy witnessed all the good that his father had done in Plains as a member of the hospital authority, a member of the Lions Club, helped to educate local farmers on agricultural practices, helped vocational schools, helped champion rural communities, and helped the local church. Jimmy's faith was restored by the kindness and goodness in people. Jimmy decided to return to Plains after his father's death, assume his father's responsibilities, and

²³ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 22.

keep up his activities. Rosalynn loved being a Navy wife and loved all the independence and responsibilities that came with the role of the job. However, she was not overly happy with the idea of returning to the small life of Plains, Georgia. They had little money upon returning to Plains. They had to live in Government housing that was newly built, with uncertain economic prospects and no assurance of an excellent, hopeful life in the Plains.²⁴

While Jimmy was a trained nuclear engineer, life in Plains differed significantly. He had to take a crash course in farming lessons. He took over the farm his father had left, the warehouse production, and farmed crops such as peanuts, cotton, soybeans, and wheat. Farming methods had not changed much in the decades since he left Plains, Georgia, as cotton and peanuts were still picked by hand. Mules and horses still, for the most part, powered the farm's equipment. Within the first several years of Jimmy taking over the farm, disaster struck several times. Jimmy had to learn to deal with droughts and IRS audits and manage the books. Jimmy knew that many farm tenants who purchased supplies from the Carters on credit did not pay their debts as they should at the end of the season. There was a problem with back taxes, and an IRS audit a few years prior led to penalties against the farm since there were no written records of income earned through timber sales. Much of the estate's money went towards paying the tax penalties. To prepare for his first year of farming in 1954, Carter spent the winter researching and traveling to agricultural workshops. He also arranged with a local fertilizer manufacturer to sell their product to his farmers. However, in 1954, Plains had the worst drought in history, leading to bad returns, and their income was just \$280. Jimmy Carter shifted focus on the farm to producing seed peanuts and growing cotton, corn, soybeans, and wheat. He then modernized the farm by implementing technologies like fertilizer-spreading trucks and equipment that made

²⁴ Carter, *A Full Life*, 66-67.

peanut and corn processing more efficient. He put his former naval engineer skills to work as he designed and built storage facilities, elevators, and a peanut-shelling plant. In the early 1960s, he established Carter's Warehouse, which offered other area farmers a wide range of services, including peanut storage and shelling, peanut seed purchase, cotton ginning, grain storage and grinding, custom fertilizer blending, and insurance.²⁵ Jimmy developed a routine, and eventually, things started to smooth out on the farm. He took over his father's responsibilities and some of his activities. He began to help other farmers with their crops in agricultural studies. He was elected to the hospital board, the Lions Club, and the Sumter County Board of Education and became active in Plains Baptist Church.²⁶ Jimmy became a contentious member of society. Rosalynn, at this time, stepped up and became his equal partner. She put in the hours at the warehouse equal to her husband. She managed the accounts and worked alongside Jimmy in his business. This created a solid private and professional bond between Jimmy and Rosalynn. This began at a time when women did not play any type of solid role in the workforce. However, Rosalynn was taking a front seat next to her husband, helping provide ample counsel to him during his business dealings and through his major community activities. This would bode well as Jimmy would start to climb the ranks of the political ladder of success.

Jimmy Carter began his political career in 1962 when he set his sights on the Georgia State Senate. This was Jimmy's first real taste into the crooked world of politics. Nobody was quite sure of the reasons Jimmy was getting into politics. Jimmy stopped to reveal to his mother that he was running for the Senate while a visiting revival preacher stayed with his mother. The preacher asked, "Why in the world would you want to become involved in the dirty game of

²⁵Brittany, "Plains to the Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Farm Life- Part 2," *Morning Ag Clips*, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.morningagclips.com/plains-to-the-presidency-jimmy-carters-farm-life-part-2/>.

²⁶ Carter, *A Full Life*, 69-77.

politics? Jimmy responded, “How would you like to be pastor of a church of 75,000 members?”²⁷ His opponent was Homer Moore, a warehouseman and peanut buyer who he happened to know. His campaign started with visiting newspaper offices and radio stations in the area and speaking to any organizations that would allow him. On Election Day, he visited different polling places to encourage voters. This is when Carter realized the complexities of politics. In Georgetown, the local political boss, Joe Hurst, supported his opponent. They required all voters to mark their ballots on a table before them and tell them to vote for Homer Moore. Then, their ballots were placed into a pasteboard box. Hurst would reach into the box several times, remove some ballots, and discard them. Jimmy reported the issue to deaf ears. Everyone knew the situation but did not want to take on the political machine. When it came time to call the election, Jimmy was ahead by 75 votes in all other counties, but in Quitman County, the home of Georgetown, the vote was 360 to 136 in favor of his opponent. Only 333 votes had been cast. Homer Moore was called the winner, but Jimmy persisted on the issue of fraud and demanded a recall. As a man of upstanding morals and integrity, Carter decided to take on the political boss machine, which shocked the state of Georgia. After going through the courts, Jimmy was seated in the Senate seat and would be elected for another two-year term without opposition.²⁸

Jimmy Carter gave a Fresh Air interview on NPR that recounted the events of his election to the Georgia Senate. He recalled that Joe Hurst was the local political boss and the chairman of the only political organization, the Democratic Committee. Everyone who voted would vote at an open table in front of Joe Hurst, who watched them vote. They put their ballots in a large whiskey box, and Joe Hurst would reach in and pull out them and even change them when he

²⁷ Carter, *A Full Life*, 81.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 83-88.

wanted to. Jimmy Carter observed this on multiple occasions. Joe Hurst was a powerful man who did not care if anyone saw him cheating. The district attorney and trial judge were under his control. Hurst had been indicted eight times on felony charges and convicted four times but never served a day in jail or paid a \$1 fine. Jimmy Carter noted in the interview that one vote in Georgetown was equal to 99 votes in Atlanta. It was all legal till the one-man-one-vote ruling came down. Jimmy Carter decided to fight the political machine with the help of a heroic reporter from the *Atlantic Journal*, John Pennington. Pennington received old records and interviewed Joe Hurst, which he found unearthed the political machine. The story made the top headlines on the front page of the Atlanta newspapers. Joe Hurst went to prison for vote fraud and for dealing in illegal liquor. Jimmy Carter noted that he wanted to revise the Georgia election code when he got into the Georgia Senate.²⁹

While Jimmy was getting set up to head down the path of political fortune, Rosalynn started to take on more responsibilities in the partnership. Jimmy was still running the warehouse business in Plains, Georgia, and he started to expand the agricultural supply business to new customers. Rosalynn began to study accounting to manage the books at the warehouse. She worked at the warehouse with their children in the afternoons and learned the ropes and the customers. She proved invaluable as she dealt with the decisions of multiple customers and the reliability of repaying debts as people bought seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, and feed for their animals. Rosalynn kept the accounting books for the warehouse purchases and sales and knew which avenues were profitable or which were losing the company money. Carter took her counsel very seriously. This was how he, in return, made some of his important decisions. They

²⁹ Terry Gross, "Jimmy Carter: The 'fresh Air' Interviews," *NPR*, March 7, 2023, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/07/1161620428/jimmy-carter-the-fresh-air-interviews>.

bounced ideas off of one another to receive better company practices. This trait followed the Carters when they took on the political world.

When Jimmy decided to run for political office, Rosalynn was right there with support. She even joined him on the political trail. She would even campaign without him, as he noted she was always effective in securing support from doubtful voters of all backgrounds. Voters were drawn to Rosalynn and expressed their views and political beliefs for a better climate in Georgia. They were often unable to express their concerns to Jimmy. The voters felt like Rosalynn was an average American citizen like them, and it put their hearts at ease, giving her the ability to attract them to the Carter ticket. Rosalynn started to love the art of politics as she analyzed issues, allocated funds, devised strategies, formulated proposals, traveled, initiated radio and television interviews, and delivered speeches. Jimmy noted that she may have liked the process even more than him, and the *New York Times* said in an article about the tireless campaigning of Rosalynn Carter and how she is the driving force behind her husband. “Her schedule is carefully planned around certain campaign themes. If there is a mental hospital in the city, she tours it, talking of the need for more such facilities; at factories, she dwells on unemployment; she visits food cooperatives and supermarkets “because I want people to know that I’m concerned that sugar has gone up 100 percent since the Republicans took over, that hamburger has gone up 59 percent, that bacon has gone up 122 percent.”³⁰ They formed a working relationship where they fed off one another, allowing the other to shine and support the other. They counseled one another to help with the burden of complex divisions. This tactic was instrumental when the Carters took on the White House.

³⁰ Wayne King, “Rosalynn Carter, a Tough, Tireless Campaigner, Displays Same Driving Quality as Her Husband,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 1976.

When the election of 1964 was heating up in the United States, so was the race for governor in Georgia. Jimmy Carter decided to leave the safety net of his Senate seat and take on the race for Governor. The election occurred in 1966, with candidates Lester Maddox, Bo Callaway, Jimmy Carter, and a write-in, Ellis Arnall. On election night, the legislature elected Maddox governor by 182 to 66. Again, this election was contested as no one won based on a majority vote. The election, for one, got thrown to the state legislature for them to choose as there was not a plurality of votes. This system of throwing the vote into the state legislature can always backfire and end in disaster as backroom deals can be made and political schemes can be enforced. The second point of contention was that the central issue of the day was the segregationist and desegregationist of the state. This issue has plagued Georgia since its conception as a state. It was one that Jimmy had dealt often with growing up within Plains and Archery. One that he had learned from his mother not to value a person by the color of their skin tone but the value of their heart as she dealt with the issue of race daily with her patients. Having seen the middle way from his mother, Jimmy now saw the corrupt political capital game of politics and faced a moral dilemma of what to do.³¹

Jimmy's moral dilemma led him to have a renewed relationship with Christ. Jimmy struggled with the balance of his political aspirations and his theological views. He had served as a Sunday School leader at his church, Plains Baptist Church, for most of his adult life, yet he avoided explaining that not everything in the Bible was true. He realized that God never changed. He didn't think people working for the poor got into heaven faster, yet he believed Christ-centered love is self-sacrificing and embraces the despised and dispossessed.³² His sister,

³¹ “Gubernatorial Election of 1966” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed September 30, 2023, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/gubernatorial-election-of-1966/>.

³² Alter, *His Very Best*, 139.

a famous evangelist and author from North Carolina, Ruth Carter Stapleton, helped provide him with an avenue to release his tensions with the world and refocus his life. She used Bible verses to strengthen her argument and pointed out that everyone was destined to fail. It was how they overcame that mattered. She told Jimmy to improve his religious faith and learn from his political defeat to become more confident and resilient. She also told him to volunteer in life, which he did by volunteering in what the Baptists call a “pioneer mission.” This proved a very productive and influential moment in Jimmy’s religious experience and how he connected with people on a personal note. Jimmy went on a mission trip to Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, where he and his partner Milo Penning were to meet with one hundred families about their faith. Some wouldn’t let them in, some already proclaimed to be Christians, and some were ready for them to come in and talk. Milo’s approach to the people put off Jimmy, but he learned from this approach when he was later campaigning for office. Milo used simple examples from the lives of people he knew and his own experiences to connect with the individuals. This would resonate with the individuals on a personal note and would often lead to them ending up in tears. Jimmy became so moved by this movement and the help from his sister Ruth that he reevaluated his life to faith in Christ. Many historians have stated that he became a born-again Christian and went on several more mission trips for Christ.³³ Jimmy never said he became a born-again Christian, as in the Southern Baptist faith, once you are baptized into Christ, you are saved. The Baptist faith viewed there as two avenues to a religious experience: those of Paul and those of Timothy. The view from when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus was a quick conversion, and then the view from Timothy came to a slower understanding of Christ’s importance in his life. Jimmy

³³ Carter, *A Full Life*, 92-93.

had the second experience, Timothy's experience. Carter's religious nature was centerfold in his political rise up the chain to the White House. Many evangelicals were awakened to vote for the first time in a political election. Quoting from Eloy Cruz, a quote that stuck with Jimmy throughout his life and through his campaign years, "A man needs only two loves in his heart: one is a love of God; the other is a love for the person who happens to be in front of you at any particular time."³⁴

In the year 1970, life in America changed dramatically socially and politically. Jimmy Carter decided to take another run at the Governorship of Georgia. His campaigning consisted of going around the state, meeting new people, handing out flyers and pamphlets, hearing their causes and issues, and networking with influential people. Rosalynn and the children joined the campaign trail, which worked in his favor. Jimmy met new people, explained his issues, and how he could relate to the Georgia people and help better their causes and relate to their problems. By election day, Carter noted that Rosalynn and he had shaken over 600,000 Georgian's hands. The tactics that the Carters used were getting to know the voters as an average American citizen. They were coming from a stance of being just like the average voter, so they told their stories and heard the stories of the average American. They related to the people on a personal note. This connected to the voters at a time in American history when politicians' trust was low. America was unsure who they could trust, and people were looking for a knight or a beacon of hope to swoop in and save them. On the first ballot, Jimmy received 48 percent of the Democratic Party votes and defeated Sanders in a runoff. In the general election, Jimmy prevailed over the Republican candidate Hal Suit, a prominent television personality from Atlanta.³⁵ Carter was Governor of Georgia and promised to push for a new change and vision for

³⁴ Alter, *His Very Best*, 145.

³⁵ Carter, *A Full Life*, 99-100.

the state. The Carter machine of Rosalynn and Jimmy were getting their feet wet in the political arena of running a government on a small scale before they tackled the big stage of Washington, D.C.

The first years of Jimmy's public office were filled with monumental historical feats. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. made his historic "I Have a Dream " speech to a massive Washington, D.C., crowd to help end segregation and discrimination practices in the South. King, Bobby Kennedy, and President John F. Kennedy were assassinated in front of the eyes of America. Richard Nixon was forced to resign as president for his corrupt political scandal in the tampering of the Democratic headquarters ballots. Then, the United States Supreme Court made a monumental decision in the court case *Gideon v. Wainwright*, stating that state courts were required to represent defendants who could not pay their attorneys under the Fourteenth Amendment.³⁶ The country went through a time of social and political upheaval. People distrusted politics and those who stood for the government. Jimmy came up the political ladder when American citizens were done with political corruption. American citizens were ready for honesty and truthfulness in their politicians. This was the perfect chance for the Carter machine. They could attract voters based on their ways of being an average American citizen. The Carters respected the American people, and this quality endeared the Carters to the hearts of the citizens. Jimmy and Rosalynn viewed people as humans with innate sights and responsibilities. Jimmy swore when taking the oath of the Governor that he was determined to lead and direct Georgia into a new direction. That brought them into the new decades with newfound hope and a better sense of social and political morals. A new America was being created around them. With the help of his wife, Rosalynn, he brought new strength and unity to a new Georgia. They worked

³⁶ Carter, *A Full Life*, 101.

together to create a new, creative system that the citizens of Georgia trusted and approved. They wanted to restore political capital and gain their constituents' hearts and trust so they could run an effective government for the people.

As governor of Georgia, Carter proved himself to be a moderate progressive businessman with a reform agenda designed to make the state government operate more efficiently. This reform was more responsive to the needs of its citizens. The reorganization of the government was crucial to Jimmy's administration as Governor. He learned his origination skills from his Navy days under Admiral Rickover. This massive reform effort continued throughout much of his four-year term as Governor. He consolidated sixty-five budgeted and 200 unbudgeted agencies, boards, bureaus, and commissions into 20-line agencies. His objective was to save money, avoid duplications, and improve the delivery of services. The most controversial part of his plan was the creation of agencies such as the Department of Administrative Services, Natural Resources, and Human Resources, which absorbed the responsibilities of 62 state agencies.

Also, to improve efficiency and reduce the costs of services, Jimmy decided to restructure the administrative origination of state government. He decided to tackle budget reform. He put a "zero-based budgeting" plan in place, where state departments and agencies would not submit an aggregate budget figure but start from scratch each year, evaluating and justifying every dollar they requested. In a speech to the National Governors' Conference, Jimmy Carter noted the outline of the zero-based budgeting plan in Georgia. "Georgia was the first government to implement a program of zero-base budgeting. Under this novel concept, every dollar requested for expenditure during the next budget period must be justified, including current expenditures that are to continue. It also provides for examining the effectiveness of each activity at various funding levels. This is a dramatically different concept from most

governments, which concentrate almost totally on proposed new expenditures when considering a new budget. Except for nonrecurring programs or expenditures, the continuing expenditures in a current budget get a little attention.”³⁷ Jimmy continued to upgrade the weak educational system. “The Adequate Program for Education in Georgia” is his educational reform package, which provided support in vocational education, reduced class sizes, and equalized funding among districts. He increased the state’s commitment to preschool education and launched a campaign that led to the introduction of a statewide kindergarten program.³⁸

Another area of change Jimmy investigated was the criminal justice field. He looked into revisions to create a unified court system, the systematic use of a merit system in selecting judges, a constitutional method of regulating judicial conduct, and much-needed penal reform.³⁹ Carter’s initiatives stated that he favored a law to extend the use of electronic surveillance equipment by law enforcement officials in cases of theft, extortion, or auto theft from ten to twenty days. Also, in the law for the surveillance equipment, it was added that the information gained from such surveillance was to be allowed to be admitted into evidence. Jimmy Carter also supported the reintroduction of the death penalty in Georgia. He also supported legislation to allow judges to deny bail to those arrested for dealing in narcotics. Jimmy Carter also supported legislation setting tough mandatory penalties for those convicted twice of selling hard drugs and making possession of marijuana a misdemeanor.⁴⁰

³⁷“Remarks at the National Governors’ Conference in Seattle, Washington,” *Remarks at the National Governors’ Conference in Seattle, Washington, The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-national-governors-conference-seattle-washington>.

³⁸ Georgia Educational Improvement Council, *Adequate Program for Education in Georgia*, (Georgia, 1973).

³⁹ *Jimmy Carter - New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed September 30, 2023, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/jimmy-carter-b-1924/>.

⁴⁰ First Debate of Carter and Crime, 21, September, 1976, box 1, White House Special Files Unit Files, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

During Jimmy's term as Governor of Georgia, minorities did not have a place in high offices or any equitable opportunities as men. An essential focus for Jimmy, due to the bond he shared with his wife, was that of women's rights. In the 1970s, women were not treated equally. This had been going on for centuries before, as women fought under Alice Paul and Susan B. Anthony in the 1920s for the right to vote, and even earlier, women were considered property under their husbands or brothers until they were married. Women were not seen, sometimes in the eye of the law, as co-equals to men. The Carter machine was the exception to the rule. For their entire marriage, Jimmy treated Rosalynn as an equal to him. They were partners. He worked, and she had the independence to run the household and care for their children. He included her in the day's decisions even when they were running the warehouse together. She took over the accounting and helped make the decisions with the customers, buying and selling the feed. Jimmy valued her counsel. This was not the case in all American homes. Men still deemed women as suppressive to them. When it came to working in industries, women's main areas were cleaning, service, shop and office work, the textile industry, civil service, nursing, and teaching. Women had no area for advancement. Politics was out of the question, as men deemed women not capable of dealing with political issues and stressors. Jimmy changed the game by advancing women's political, executive, and judicial careers. He also added women to his staff to increase the number of women working in politics. Jimmy valued women in the workforce, just as he valued the independence and productivity his wife had completed for years. Later on, throughout his presidency, he continued championing women's rights through the First Ladyship and the executive and judicial positions.

The 39th President of the United States, James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, grew up in humble beginnings. He dealt with the average American problem of the time during the Great

Depression: no running water, no electricity, and no heating and air. Like any American growing up during that time, he persevered and grew a love for the outdoors and other hobbies. His family was his backbone. They molded and shaped him into the man he became. Jimmy notably became one of the most humble, caring Presidents of the United States. Jimmy followed his father's steps by becoming a "Renaissance man" or a jack of all trades. He became a nuclear engineer. He returned to the farm and adapted to farm life. He eventually went on to a life in politics. He did all this while maintaining an active social life. He participated in various associations and networking opportunities around Georgia and Washington, D.C. Through his humble beginnings, Jimmy was given his ideological principles by his dad, mother, and teacher. These principles grounded Jimmy and enabled him to adapt to new situations gracefully. Through hard work and determination, Jimmy was able to flip the script. He overcame obstacles before him without losing his composure or gentle tone.

His most valuable asset was his wife, Rosalynn Carter. Rosalynn challenged Jimmy to expand his ideas and aspirations. She was his equal partner in every way, both privately and professionally. She was not just the woman behind the man. She took the stage herself in every way possible. When Jimmy was in the Navy, she used her independence to care for the family and keep the household running. When they arrived back in Plains, she assisted in running the warehouse, actively participating in the business's accounting and soliciting customer advice and the business transactions of the day. She learned who to buy from and who not to buy from. Once the political arena kicked off, she was an asset to Jimmy. Rosalynn is on the stage on various campaign fronts. She went to multiple events and campaigned for her husband. She learned how to listen to the American voters and heard them cry. She told them how her husband could improve their situation through his policies. Rosalynn actively supported Jimmy

throughout his campaign; she even counseled him on his speeches and commitment to campaign events. Once in office, she took up key issues herself and played an active role in the administration of Jimmy Carter. This helped the Carter administration push for the advancement of women in the workforce. Women had not been shone in the workforce in the previous administration to the extent that the Carters brought them in. Through the professional bond that Rosalynn and Jimmy share, they made a stand on the issue of women's rights.

Although Jimmy Carter is not known as a great President, he has given historians something to ponder. His term in office provided many facets of political layers. Jimmy is noted for being humble and laid back. Carter has provided historians with information to reevaluate the merit of his success as a President. Examining his policy towards women in different phases of his office continues through his bond with Rosalynn. The Carter machine was a solid, cohesive force that dominated the campaign trail in the 1970s. Many historians looked over their strengths at the time. Jimmy Carter used his Presidency to make a lasting legacy that substantially promoted minorities. This has proven suitable for women in the workforce for generations to come. His legacy revealed what some historians have diminished or even ignored. Jimmy Carter found a life partner in Rosalynn Carter, a formidable opponent in marriage, and an equal partnership in the professional arena.

Chapter 3

A Girl from the Wrong Side of the Tracks

A president and his first lady share an intimate bond, and they are considered by many to be two of the most influential people in the United States. They can set public opinion for the masses with a swoop of their pen, tone of voice, or body language. The most unique thing that set Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter apart from previous Presidents and First Ladies was their bond. Their bond transcended personal relationships and affected the office of the White House, as she was an extension of the office of the President and was his closest confidant. Their bond influenced public opinion. It changed how the nation viewed how presidents would operate in the executive office. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter revolutionized the office of the Presidency. Jimmy and Rosalynn merged their private relationship into their professional relationship. The Carters were able to create a unified and all-inclusive office. Rosalynn was Jimmy's backbone. She was his muse. Carter wrote a letter to Rosalynn Carter while he was away with the Navy, which was read by their daughter Amy at her funeral service, capturing the essence of their relationship. Jimmy Carter denoted, "My darling every time I have ever been away from you, I have been thrilled to discover just how wonderful you are. While I was away I tried to convince myself you could not be as sweet and beautiful as I remember. But when I see you, I fall in love with you all over again. Does that seem strange to you? It doesn't to me. Goodbye, darling. Until tomorrow, Jimmy."¹ What were the characteristics that made Rosalynn and Jimmy a perfect match? How did Rosalynn develop into a critical player in the political game? One must delve into her background from childhood to young adulthood to gain a substantial understanding of

¹ David Charter, "Jimmy Carter's Moving Love Letter to Rosalynn Read at Memorial," *The Times & The Sunday Times: Breaking News & Today's Latest Headlines*, November 29, 2023.

Rosalynn Carter. Ironically, fate had Jimmy and Rosalynn bonded from the beginning of their lives. It bonded them into the powerful couple that they became in later years.

South Bond Street, Plains, Georgia, was home to Earl, Lillian Carter, Edgar, and Allie Smith. The Smiths and the Carters lived next door to one another before the Carters moved to Archery, Georgia. Edgar owned an auto repair shop, the first in Sumter County. He also worked on a small farm on the outskirts of town. He was also known for his friendly checkers games and driving the school bus. Driving the bus is where he met his future wife, Frances Allethea Murray “Allie”, when she was only thirteen. Edgar was nine years Allie’s senior, and out of respect for her parents, they waited until she received her college diploma before they married at the Plains Methodist Church. On August 28, 1927, Eleanor Rosalynn Smith was born, and the midwife was Lillian Carter. She was named after her maternal grandmother, Rosa, so her name is pronounced “Rose-a-lynn” and not “Roz-a-lynn.” After Rosalynn’s birth, Lillian brought her toddler Jimmy, who was just shy of his third birthday, to the Smith house.² Of course, Jimmy and Rosalynn were too young to remember the meeting. Fate would have plans for their future. Rosalynn later noted that life handed their future to them. They grew up three years and three miles apart.

Rosalynn grew up in the tiny town of Plains, Georgia. Plains was only one square mile, with a population of only six hundred. It was a typical small southern town where everyone knew everybody. There was no such thing as privacy. Everyone was there to help their neighbors in times of trouble, celebrate in times of triumph, and just be neighborly daily. The town was isolated from the rest of the world. Plains was its little oasis. There was no movie theater, library, or recreation center in town. The center of the town was all the churches. Rosalynn noted her grandmother Murray was Lutheran, her grandfather was Baptist, and her parents were Methodist;

² Alter, *His Very Best*, 62-63.

therefore, her life was full of different church services and socials. She attended all three churches at various times. She participated in their Sunday schools, prayer meetings, church services, and Bible schools. Religion was vital to her mother, and she stressed the importance of faith to her children. They were taught to love and fear God. They were raised to believe God wanted them to live a Godly life. This meant loving one another, being kind to others, and helping those in need. Not only was the church the focal point of the community, but so was the school. Rosalynn's father revered education and pushed his children to go as far into the world of education as they could. He wanted this for his children since he did not have the opportunity to do so himself. The schools at the time were segregated. The school in Plains, where Rosalynn attended, had a hundred and fifty students in eleventh grade. Unlike today's school systems, the parents were very much involved in the schools; they participated in every school activity.³ Even though Rosalynn lived in a small community, she made the most of her life in the Plains. She challenged herself with her studies. She made the most of all the religious and social activities by frequently participating in community events.

The household in which Rosalynn grew up was plain and simple. It was a white frame house in the middle of Plains. Her mother loved to grow zinnias, petunias, hollyhocks, crepe myrtles, and other flowers on the side street of their house. The backyard held a vegetable garden with many trees like fig, pear, pecan, wild cherry, and pomegranate bushes. Their backyard was filled with different commodities for a Southern way of life. There was a cookstove and a smokehouse. In the category of animals, there was a chicken house filled with chickens. There was also a spot where a rabbit pen had been, but they had to get rid of it due to the nature of multiplying rabbits. They had a barn for the milk cow and a few pigs. Another barn was for the

³ Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 2-3.

mules Rosalynn's father used on a nearby farm. Dust was a prominent fixture at the Smith's home. When a car passed the house, red dust would engulf the house. They lived on one of the most heavily traveled dirt roads, and the dust would settle on the front porch and seep into the house.⁴

Poverty surrounded Rosalynn Smith, yet her parents never let it show. Rosalynn never knew she was in absolute poverty growing up. Her family faced the same challenges as all citizens going through the 1929 stock market crash. Her father lost his nest, egg, and one thousand dollars when the Plains bank failed in 1926. When the stock market crashed in 1929, the Smiths went through all the same aches and pains as all American citizens. They escaped hardship because the Smiths grew their food and made clothes. They survived through the hardships of the Great Depression by managing their fate. They either did without what they could not afford or created their own. They became resourceful.

Growing up, there were no other girls in town her age. Ruth, Jimmy's sister, lived in the country, and they did not become acquainted till she started school. So, Rosalynn spent a lot of time with her brothers. They played kick the can, cops, and robbers and set up a pretend store in their barn. They played at night under the streetlights and climbed on the bales of cotton that lined the streets in the summer, waiting to be shipped on the railroad. They liked to go to Magnolia Springs and swim in the cool spring water pool. She also spent a lot of time off to herself. She loved dolls; her mother made clothes for them and taught her how to sew. Not all Rosalynn's time was spent in leisure. Chores were a big part of her responsibilities as a child.

⁴ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 1.

Her duties were to make the beds, churn, sweep the porch, and wash and dry the dishes. Her father was very strict about their responsibilities, and they did their best to please him.⁵

Rosalynn's father was a strict yet loving man. He ran an automotive shop and drove the school bus. He stressed education to his children. He wanted them to have the best and achieve as much education as possible, even though he did not have the opportunity to gain education himself. He knew of its importance. He did tricks for his children, told them stories, turned cartwheels, and even baked a cake to entertain them. He showed his children his love for them and the responsibility of spending time with their family. He didn't drink and had no patience for those who did. He liked hunting and fishing and occasionally took time off work to enjoy those activities. His only vice was he would occasionally smoke a pipe. Rosalynn was taught to mind her parents, especially her father. She looked up to him and wanted to please him however she could. At the age of thirteen, Rosalynn's father became very ill. The Smiths had sent their children away for the summer on various activities, Rosalynn to Camp Dooley and her brothers and little sister to Rosalynn's mother's parents. Her father had been in the hospital for tests, and they assured the children that he would be fine. Her father, unfortunately, was not alright. One day in August, her father started having trouble breathing, and her mother told her to call the doctor. Rosalynn was so scared she ran to the doctor's house. From then on, her father became steadily worse, and he stayed in bed much of the time. He would call the family in for daily reports and talk about the future and his expectations for them as they become adults. Jimmy's mother, Lillian, was soon there daily to care for Mr. Smith. Lillian was there the night Mr. Smith passed away. Rosalynn remembered the night and noted that Lillian had taken her home with her. Many people had crowded the house, so Lillian took her home to spend the night with her

⁵ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 4-5.

daughter Ruth. Yet, in the middle of the night, Lillian awoke Rosalynn and brought her home. Her father had died of leukemia at the age of forty-four.⁶

Life for the Smiths changed drastically. After her father died, her maternal grandparents, Mama and Papa Murray, helped out a lot. Less than a year after her father's death, her mother received a call that her mother had passed away. Papa Murray moved in with the Smiths, and he leaned on them for strength. Rosalynn's mother was now responsible for managing the meager finances for her family, raising four children, and caring for her father. For the first time, Mrs. Smith had to go to work. She first took on sewing jobs to support her family. This was something that Rosalynn could help with, too. The milk and butter from their cow were also sold to help with the income for the house. Eventually, her mother got a job, for a while, in the school lunchroom and the grocery store. Finally, when Rosalynn was in high school, she got a part-time job in the post office. Later, it became a full-time job. Rosalynn's mother depended on her a lot. She asked her counsel about the smaller children, jobs, clothes, and family finances. This was shadowed when Jimmy relied on Rosalynn's counsel in both the private and professional sectors of their lives. Rosalynn lost her childhood at thirteen. She had to be responsible and had to grow up fast. She was always expected to be good and make the right decisions.⁷

Rosalynn had very high expectations for herself. She set them, not only not wanting to let her parents down but not wanting to let herself down. This was a trait that was manifested during the campaign and White House years with Jimmy. She worked to get him elected and worked for the betterment of the American people. Her fascination for worldly endeavors came in the seventh grade. Plains, Georgia, was an isolated community, but she was highly interested in

⁶ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 8-10.

⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

current events. Her teacher pushed her to read the newspaper and listen to the radio. It stretched her mind outside of the world around her. Rosalynn became interested in what was happening throughout the country and worldwide events. Later, the same teacher, Miss MacArthur, brought a map of the world into the classroom. She informed the students that there was a war going on around the world in Europe and told them they were to learn about it.⁸ This event sparked Rosalynn's interest in world politics. She later worked under Jimmy's administration and was an ambassador to Latin American countries, where she worked to promote goodwill and economic prosperity.

Rosalynn was also influenced in school by the same teacher who influenced Jimmy, Miss Julia Coleman. She taught the students to achieve their very best in their work. She prepared them for the outside world and taught them that "any schoolboy, even one of ours, might grow up to be President of the United States."⁹ During those times, the only jobs for women were to prepare for life as housewives or schoolteachers. Miss Coleman taught them to challenge that convention. Her experience with Miss Coleman fired up Rosalynn's imagination. She loved math, science, and machines. She had visions of becoming an architect, a stewardess, an interior decorator, or even a famous artist.

In 1944, Rosalynn graduated from high school as valedictorian. She fulfilled her father's wishes for her to receive a higher education by going to Georgia Southwestern in nearby Americus. She carpooled with a friend and rode the bus back in the afternoon. This was the year that Rosalynn noted she fell in love with Ruth's brother's picture. That man was away at Annapolis, Maryland, at the Naval Academy. The brother was Jimmy Carter. Ruth was still in

⁸ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid*, 13

high school when Rosalynn started college. They remained good friends and spent a lot of time together. Rosalynn had never really known Jimmy; he was three years older than her and had been away at school for four years. She noted that he always seemed out of reach for her, but she idolized Ruth's photo of him. She could not keep her eyes off of it. Ruth loved the idea of her best friend and brother in a romantic relationship. Ruth would plot fantasy romances with Rosalynn as a joke while scheming to get them together in real life. As the story goes, during the summer of 1945, Ruth kept trying to arrange a time for Rosalynn to appear at their house when Jimmy was home. Before the summer was over, Ruth invited Rosalynn to the Pond House for a picnic and to clean up the yard with them. Rosalynn went with pleasure. Jimmy paid attention to Rosalynn that day, teasing her about everything, especially how she made her sandwiches with salad dressing instead of mayonnaise and the pieces of bread not matching. The two talked all day. Rosalynn left with the thought that the age gap was noticeable, and that was all he noticed. She left with the notion that the age gap would keep them friends, which was okay.

The story, however, of Jimmy and Rosalynn was not over. Later that same afternoon, after the Pond House picnic, Rosalynn was on her way to a youth group meeting at the church. She was standing outside with friends, and a car drove up, to which Jimmy got out. He asked if she would go to the movies with Ruth and her boyfriend. She replied yes. She had been dreaming about his picture and going on dates with him for so long, and now she was at the movies with him. She did not remember the movie that night but remembered that the conversation was easy and her night was wonderful. On the way home that night, he kissed her. She was so delighted; it had never happened before, and she was swept off her feet. Rosalynn went with Ruth and his family to drop him off at the train station and return him to school. She knew it probably was not the proper thing to do, but she wanted to see him again. Jimmy was

surprised to see her again. Unbeknownst to Rosalynn, Jimmy told his mother after the movies that Rosalynn was the girl he would marry. Jimmy called Rosalynn to the side at the train station, asked her to write to him, and kissed her once again. A romance was born.¹⁰

For months, Jimmy and Rosalynn wrote to one another, describing their life adventures and getting to know one another. Jimmy continued to tease Rosalynn through his letters, writing one letter in particular about a beautiful girl he was going out with. Jimmy told Rosalynn that she was the eight-year-old daughter of the commandant at the end of the letter. He also kept telling Rosalynn not to stay home and wait for him, go out with other people, and live her life. This angered Rosalynn. Rosalynn finally avenged Jimmy for his letter about the girl and retained Jimmy's true feelings. Rosalynn wrote to Jimmy about all the boys she saw after school, even those she played Ping Pong with in the afternoon. In return, Jimmy wrote a furious letter asking her not to go out with anyone anymore or with anybody else.¹¹ Jimmy broke and noted his true feelings about Rosalynn.

Christmas finally came, and the two were reunited again. Rosalynn was smitten with Jimmy in his dress blues and Jimmy was smitten with Rosalynn. They went to Christmas parties together and took long drives together. To solidify their relationship for the ages, Jimmy gave Rosalynn a Carter endearment "ILYTG" which stood for "I love you the goodest" engraved into a beautiful silver compact. On the last night he was home, he proposed to her. Rosalynn turned him down. Rosalynn noted that the proposal was too soon for her.¹² She wasn't ready to get married, and she had promised her father that she would get a college education first. Rosalynn

¹⁰ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 15-17.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 17.

¹² *Ibid*, 18.

noted that she felt very young and naïve next to his worldly manner. She had regained a lot of confidence that she had lost when her father died, but she still did not feel like she had as much confidence as she needed. She tried to explain all that to Jimmy; thankfully, he understood. They decided to wait but didn't tell anyone he proposed to her.

Letters started to be written daily now, as the two were in love as never before. Rosalynn started to fall more in love with Jimmy, and her indecision to marry him began to fade away. She had her first visit to Annapolis on Washington's Birthday weekend, and Jimmy proposed again. This time, Rosalynn accepted. They agreed to tell no one and to keep it all bottled up even though his parents were also there visiting. Later they found out that his father was furious with Jimmy for spending so much time with Rosalynn instead of entertaining them while they were there. When Rosalynn returned home, Jimmy sent her a copy of *The Navy Wife*, a guidebook, which she studied every detail of, and they prepared for their graduations.¹³ The Navy guidebook explains the way of pay, living expenses, travel, children, emergencies, support groups, and social life. The book offers what to expect about separation, homecomings, life overseas, shore duty, marital dynamics, and divorce. The book also covers military careers, spousal careers, reenlistment, retirement, and transition to civilian life.¹⁴ Rosalynn had always wanted to get out of Plains, and now, with Jimmy, they could both conquer the world together and see what new adventures life would bring them. Jimmy teased her that she was only marrying him to get out of Plains, but she had been in love with him long before. It all started with his picture.

¹³ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 18.

¹⁴ Laura Hall Stavridis, About the Author, and Laura Stavridis, "Navy Spouse's Guide," *U.S. Naval Institute*, accessed May 23, 2024, <https://www.usni.org/press/books/navy-spouses-guide#overview>.

Rosalynn finally told her mother of the plans, and her mother was concerned that she knew what she was doing since she was just eighteen. Her mother was happy for her. On the other hand, the Carters were not so happy for Jimmy. His father was very disappointed. He had grand plans for him, and marrying Rosalynn was not one of them. Ruth had a special bond with Jimmy, and now that the relationship with Rosalynn had become serious, she became jealous of it. It took a while for Ruth and Rosalynn to be comfortable together again. Miss Lillian, his mother, was the only champion of the marriage.

On July 7, 1946, Jimmy and Rosalynn were married in a small private ceremony. Only their families and friends who wanted to come were there. Jimmy picked Rosalynn up at her house, and they drove to the church together. When they got out of the car, they heard the wedding march. Years later, they found out that it was playing for the second time that day. Jimmy escorted her up the church steps and down the aisle. Mrs. Jimmy Carter was born.

Rosalynn was now a Navy wife, and this once shy girl was now faced with finding new confidence in faraway places. Relying on one another, Jimmy and his new bride were off to start new adventures together in places they had never experienced before. Their first port of married life was Norfolk, Virginia. However, Rosalynn soon found out that life in the Navy was to be an isolated one. Jimmy was gone to work at sea from Monday until Thursday or Friday every week. He then had duty on the ship one of the nights he was in port. That only left him home one or two nights a week. His work was interesting; he completed things like testing new navigation radars, communications, and gunnery equipment installed in the *U.S.S. Wyoming*, and she loved hearing about it. However, Rosalynn felt very isolated at home in a new place. For the first time, she had to learn to deal with the landlord, the plumber, and the electrician. She was forced to learn to do things she never knew she could do, things that needed to be done to maintain a

house.¹⁵ Rosalynn faced a period of self-isolation. She felt very alone and had to learn to be independent quickly. Before leaving Plains, she knew the basics. Just like every young woman her age, she had taken care of her family. Now, she was left to care for a house, and Jimmy relied on her to take care of things while he was away with the Navy. This would have been scary for anyone, and now Rosalynn had to face it in a foreign land to her. She never gave up.

Rosalynn had to learn to grow more independent and responsible when she found out she was pregnant with her first child. John William Carter was born on July 3, 1947. Jimmy was able to take two weeks off to help with the baby and house chores, but then it was back to the routine. Rosalynn was alone with the baby and the house again, except for a day or so on the weekends. Rosalynn noted that it was a difficult adjustment. Back home in Plains, there would have been someone to help with newborns, but in Norfolk, there was no one.¹⁶ Eventually, Rosalynn developed a routine. She settled into her mother and wife roles. She cooked, cleaned, and took care of the baby. They even bought a sewing machine so that she could make her clothes and the baby's clothes. Rosalynn was starting to be content with her newfound life.

Independence and freedom came when Jimmy began to be stationed at various naval locations. Rosalynn got her first taste of what Navy life could offer when they moved to New London, Connecticut, in the spring of 1948 so that Jimmy could attend submarine school. For the first time since their marriage, Jimmy has kept regular hours and has been home at night. All the students and their families were housed close together. While the men went to school, the wives visited back and forth. The families became a close-knit community. The families sat outside together and talked while watching their kids play. They often walked to the officers' club or the

¹⁵ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 19-20.

¹⁶Ibid, 21.

movies together. Rosalynn no longer felt alone and isolated. She was able to bond with other Navy wives who were going through the same situations as her. At one particular base, the Carters took classes to improve themselves. The classes they took helped them advance in their careers. They attended an art class using the mediums charcoals, watercolors, and oil paints. The next subject they studied was Spanish, with a young Peruvian couple.¹⁷ During Carter's presidential term in the White House, the Spanish class later aided Rosalynn while serving as ambassador in Latin American communities.

While Jimmy was serving in the Navy, news arrived that his father had cancer. Jimmy rushed home to Georgia to be by his father's side. Jimmy had been away for eleven years, and Rosalynn noted that he felt guilty for spending so much time away from his father. Mr. Earl had always been active in the community and enjoyed serving others. He served on the school board, hospital authority, and Lions Club and was recently elected to the state legislature. When Jimmy returned home, he learned so much about the man his father had been. Mr. Earl had quietly bought graduation clothes for children who couldn't afford them. He loaned money to farmers who bought his seed and fertilizer. He assisted a widow in town for years after her husband died. These revelations about his father gave Jimmy a new perspective on life in small-town Georgia. It made his glamorous life in the Navy seem very small. Rosalynn realized that life in the Navy was soon coming to an end.¹⁸ After Mr. Earl's funeral, Jimmy announced that he had decided to leave the Navy and return home to Plains. His only brother, Billy, was still in high school, and there was no one to take over his father's business. His father had worked hard to build his business, which meant so much to many people.

¹⁷ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 22-23.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

Rosalynn was not happy with Jimmy's return to Plains, Georgia. She feared losing her newfound independence if she returned to Plains. His mind was made up, and back to Plains they went. An article in the *Washington Post* noted Rosalynn Carter's take on coming back to life in Plains, "I argued. I cried. I even screamed at him. I loved our life in the Navy and the independence I had finally achieved. I knew it would be gone if we went home to live in the same community with my mother and Jimmy's mother. Plains had too many ghosts for me. And what about the children? Jack had been to kindergarten. The others wouldn't have a chance because there was no kindergarten in Plains. There was no swimming pool, no beach nearby. Surely, we would never travel anymore, and they would also miss those adventures and experiences. But Jimmy would have none of it. His mind was made up, and he is a very stubborn man. It was the most serious argument of our marriage, and I wondered how or if I could hide the way I felt or the tension between us from our families."¹⁹

Rosalynn was initially miserable, but eventually, she realized how much she enjoyed being near her mother. She soon began getting involved with community activities. Church became part of their new norm, and they renewed their old friendships. They returned home in 1954. Their first year back in Plains was tough. The Carters were living in government housing and on a tight budget. They did not have any money for leisure activities. Almost all of their savings went into buying equipment and keeping Mr. Earl's business in partnership with Miss Lillian. 1954 proved one of the worst drought years in Georgia's history. The peanut crop was a failure, along with the corn and cotton crops. No one was able to repay the credit Jimmy had extended them. Carter's annual income was less than two hundred dollars.²⁰ They were learning

¹⁹ Jonathan Yardley, "First Lady from Plains by Rosalynn Carter. Houghton Mifflin. 384 Pp. \$17.95," *The Washington Post*.

²⁰ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 33.

the hard way how to run a business and cope with new demands. Jimmy was not utilizing all of his talents or the skills of his wife. Jimmy tried to manage the business independently; as the saying goes, he was taking on more than he could chew.

Things changed in the spring of 1955. Jimmy took on full responsibility for all aspects of the business. He bought and sold seed and fertilizer and loaded it on the farmers' trucks. He visited farmers, kept the books, made out the bills, and kept the office clean. Jimmy did all this because there were no funds to hire employees. One afternoon, Jimmy called Rosalynn to come and answer the telephone for him. He wanted to visit some customers. That one day, they turned into a week and, before long, two. Before long, Rosalynn was making out bills for the customers, posting sales to the farmers' accounts, and paying the bills.²¹ Rosalynn loved the experience. She loved doing more than just housework and loved feeling important. The children loved it, too. They enjoyed climbing on the fertilizer bags and performing chores Jimmy found for them. 1955 turned into a good year as the year was filled with rain. Farmers became full of anticipation for the harvest season to come. From mid-August to mid-October, peanuts poured into the Carters warehouse by the truckload. Seasonal workers were hired, and people worked around the clock.

As the business took off, Rosalynn and Jimmy became productive community members. Rosalynn, along with Jimmy, joined the Baptist Church. They both taught Sunday school on Sunday mornings and the Baptist Training Union at night. Rosalynn joined the PTA and the Garden Club. She became a board member for a local theater group and a den mother for the boys' Cub Scout pack. She took the kids to swimming lessons and basketball games. She fed the farmers Jimmy brought home for lunch. Rosalynn also took on more responsibility at the warehouse. She had a friend who taught accounting at the state technical and vocational school

²¹ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 33.

who gave her a set of accounting books. She studied the texts until she learned the balancing of columns and how to complete financial statements. Not only was Rosalynn becoming involved in the community and the business, but there was also time for fun. Rosalynn and Jimmy loved playing golf, took dancing lessons, and took a speed reading course at a college in Americus. They broke tradition in Plains and closed their warehouse on Saturday afternoons. This afforded the Carters time to spend with their family. They enjoyed outside activities like camping, fishing in Florida, and the Sebring races.²²

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter's marriage had become more than just an intimate bond; it transformed into a formidable working relationship. Most scholars denoted that the treatment of women throughout history was compared to that of submissive to men. Jimmy Carter denoted in his writings on human rights the characteristics that put into question whether women should be subservient. He demonstrated that Jesus Christ was the greatest liberator of women. He denoted that most Bible scholars acknowledged that the Holy Scriptures were written when male dominance prevailed in every aspect of life. When Jesus began his ministry, the treatment of women throughout the Roman Empire was compared to chattel property. Women were considered property to their fathers or husbands, could not contradict decisions, and had few legal rights. However, through Jesus Christ's teachings, he treated women as equal to men. As stated in scripture in Paul's writings to the Galatians, he states, "But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."²³ In leaning into their faith, Jimmy and

²² Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 37-38.

²³ Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 86-92.

Rosalynn Carter harnessed Jesus's teachings to strengthen their relationship and build a foundation of mutual understanding. By looking at one another as equal partners, they challenged one another to thrive in their respective fields while building one another up in their areas of need.

Politics soon came knocking on Jimmy's thirty-eighth birthday. He announced to Rosalynn that he was going to run for state senate. At that time, Georgia senators served two years rotating in their three-county district. They were usually hand-picked by a small group of political bosses, county by county. However, Georgia had recently been reapportioned to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court's "one man, one vote" ruling, and a special election was called. Jimmy's opponent, Homer Moore, from nearby Stewart County, had the sympathy of many people. He had already won the seat under the old rules and was now forced to run again. Jimmy thought he had an edge in expanding his business and all the farmers he had visited, and they lived in Sumter County, the largest in the new district.²⁴ Rosalynn was thrilled with the idea of Jimmy running for state senator. Then she thought about the business. If he won, Jimmy would be in Atlanta for almost three months of the year except for weekends. Rosalynn would be responsible for the warehouse's functioning. He would be gone in the winter during the slow season. Her focus shifted to the political race. She liked to win and did not want to take a chance on losing.

This race was a brutal wake-up call into the world of politics for the Carters. Jimmy campaigned from county to county while Rosalynn ran the warehouse. When Rosalynn was free, she tried to call every registered voter in Sumter County. She introduced herself to the constituents she knew as Rosalynn Carter and Mrs. Jimmy Carter, to the people she did not know

²⁴ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 44.

because she wanted the constituents she did not personally know. She wanted the people to remember his name. She received help from Jimmy's sister, Gloria, and other friends to address thousands of letters. They divided the list of voters for other volunteers to call. Rosalynn went door to door, to every house in town, to tell people that Jimmy was going to run for the Senate and ask people for their support. On a primary day, Jimmy went from one polling venue to another and quickly discovered why elections in Quitman County always went the way of county boss Joe Hurst. There were no voting booths. Everyone was casting ballots in public while Mr. Hurst watched. Jimmy's protest fell on deaf ears, and he even had a friend come and watch the polls to no avail. On election night, the returns came in from every county except Quitman. Jimmy was leading by 70 votes, and when their returns finally came in, 330 people had voted, but 430 votes were counted. They had lost the election.²⁵

Jimmy did not give up the election. He contested the election on grounds of fraud. Rosalynn heard threats on his life. One of their customers told her that his business had burned down the last time anyone had crossed Joe Hurst. She was frightened for Jimmy's well-being. However, they were determined to prevail against the crooks. There were hearings, appeals, and counterappeals in the six weeks before the general election. A neutral judge examined the Quitman County ballot box, an Old Crow whiskey carton that was found under the bed of Joe Hurst's daughter's bed. It was sealed at the top but not at the bottom. When he opened it, he discovered that the voter's list was gone, as were the ballot subs. He declared Jimmy the winner.²⁶ Before this, Rosalynn had been naïve with politics. To think that politics was corrupt, along with sheriffs and judges, was mind-boggling. She was also disillusioned to believe that county

²⁵ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 45-46.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 46.

officials and political figures had the people's best interest at heart. Everything she had believed in had been contradicted, and she hated that dirty politics had been exposed and appeared to be the norm.

For Rosalynn, the most challenging part of politics was learning how to deal with the criticism that went along with political life. Her emotions swayed between hurt, mad, and sad. She found that local politics was the worst. Rosalynn did not expect everyone to be for them at the state or national level, and they accepted that they would have enemies. At home, you expect everyone to support you. It hurts to hear untrue or unfair things about you. Jimmy soothed her by saying, "If you don't think I'm doing the best job I can possibly do, then worry about the criticism. But if you think I am doing my best, then relax."²⁷

In 1965, he was named one of the five most influential and respected senators in a poll of his peers and journalists in the capital. In the spring of 1966, Jimmy announced his plans to run for Congress. During this campaign, they had more help at the warehouse; Billy, Jimmy's brother, was now working there. Jimmy drove around the district daily, meeting people and seeking support. After each visit, he returned to his car and used a small tape recorder to list the names of the people he met and personal information about them. Once he returned home, Jimmy, Gloria, and Rosalynn would write personal notes to each person on that list. Jimmy was forced into running for governor of Georgia midstream during this election. This launched the family's first campaign. Billy ran the warehouse, his wife Sybil filled in for Rosalynn, and the rest of the Carters traveled across the state. They had a giant map of Georgia with a different colored pin for each family member. They mapped out their separate routes weekly and would come home on Saturdays to collapse for one evening. They went to church on Sunday morning

²⁷ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 49.

and headed out in the afternoon to start again. They looked up the newspaper office, radio, and television stations to get interviews. They shook hands with every person they could find, gave them a brochure, and kept going. Rosalynn got an accurate dose of politics while campaigning in Washington, Georgia. She handed a brochure to a man standing in the doorway of a shoe shop and asked him to vote for Jimmy. He was chewing tobacco, to which he replied he was for the opponent Bo Callaway, and he spat on her. She never gave up, though, driving through towns with posters of Jimmy taped on the sides of her car. However, when primary night came, Jimmy was short 20,000 votes.²⁸The family had to regroup and reevaluate what they would do from there.

Rosalynn recalled the time of Jimmy's "born again Christian" conversion. She noted that there were no flashing lights or weeping, no trauma or emotional scenes. It was just a quiet acceptance of God and God's will for his life. Jimmy's sister, Ruth, was now doing Christian work full-time. They listened carefully as she described her close relationship with God and what it meant to her life. One day when Jimmy was disgusted with politics, Ruth and Jimmy took a walk. Jimmy expressed his concerns to her, telling her he had accomplished much for himself but felt he had not done enough for anyone else. He wanted to be a better Christian. They had a long, intimate discussion, and he learned he wanted what she had: a deeper religious life and convictions. Rosalynn said that in the election of 1976, the notion of this religious experience of an episode of "born again" got blown out of proportion.²⁹

On April 23, 1970, Jimmy formally announced his candidacy for governor for a second time. Neighbors volunteered to travel across the state campaigning, and the peanut brigade was

²⁸ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 55-56.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 62.

born. Once again, the family got out their map of Georgia, each with colored pins with a section of Georgia. Rosalynn started traveling and campaigning. They looked for crowds anywhere. They attended sporting events, livestock sales, tobacco barns, rodeos and horse shows, county fairs, and local festivals. Rosalynn loved campaigning at fire stations and that firemen cook the best side meat and biscuits. Sometimes, she arrived in time, and they would share with her. She disliked K-Marts because they did not allow soliciting, and they had probably been thrown out of every K-Mart in Georgia. They campaigned in unlikely places, such as shrimp boats and hot-air balloons. She campaigned at the first tobacco auction she attended. She even witnessed a rattlesnake roundup. One day, Rosalynn and Miss Lillian even campaigned at a poultry processing plant in North Georgia. As they shook hands with the workers, cold, wet, plucked chickens passed overhead while women sitting at rows of tables below cut off their wings or other parts.³⁰

Election Day was exciting for the family. The Carters got up and voted like the other Georgia citizens. They then drove to Atlanta, stopping in the communities along the way to greet people going to the polls. Midafternoon, Rosalynn went with her sons to the Ford Motor plant to stand outside the factory gate in the middle of the street. They passed out brochures to people in their cars as they drove away. At the end of the election night, they had a good showing. They defeated Carl Sanders in the runoff and Hal Suit, the Republican candidate, in the general election. Jimmy Carter was the seventy-sixth governor of Georgia.³¹

The National Governors Association denoted that governors' spouses have long been active in raising awareness about social concerns, especially those affecting children and

³⁰ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 64-65.

³¹ *Ibid*, 70-71.

families. Governors' spouses lend their voices and spearhead policies to support critical issues and mobilize communities to work toward a common purpose. For example, in 1994, the governors' spouses rallied behind a national breast cancer awareness campaign. Then, in 1997, they launched a national women's health initiative, drawing attention to a more comprehensive set of women's health concerns, including cardiovascular disease, mental health, physical activity, and nutrition. In their respective states, spouses chair statewide coalitions and steering committees and participate in media campaigns and legislative advocacy. With the leadership provided by the governor's spouses, they are effective in raising public awareness about significant social and public health concerns and improving the well-being of the citizens of their states.³²

Rosalynn was no different. Rosalynn took a very active role as First Lady of the Governorship of Georgia. One of her first plans was mental health. The *Smithsonian Magazine* ran an article noting the passion of Rosalynn Carter's plan for mental health. "Jimmy "reached for my hand before realizing who I was," wrote Rosalynn in her 1984 autobiography, *First Lady From Plains*. "I didn't care. I had an important question to ask him: 'I want to know what you are going to do about mental health when you are governor.' He replied immediately, 'We're going to have the best mental health system in the country, and I'm going to put you in charge of it.'" Though this lofty goal failed to come to fruition, Rosalynn did serve on a mental health commission launched by her husband during his tenure as governor, and the conversations she had with voters sparked her lifelong interest in mental health."³³ Very soon after Jimmy's

³² More about governors' spouses, *National Governor's Association* accessed June 14, 2024, <https://www.nga.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/More-About-Governors-Spouses-Nov-2017.pdf>.

³³ Meilan Solly "From the Governor's Mansion to the White House and beyond, Rosalynn Carter Was a Tireless Advocate for the Vulnerable," *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 19, 2023.

inauguration, he formed the Governor's Commission to Improve Services to the mentally and emotionally handicapped. Rosalynn and mental health professionals, laymen, parents, and concerned citizens were appointed to the commission. She attended all the commission meetings, worked one day a week as a volunteer at the Georgia Regional Hospital, and toured other hospitals. She planted flower beds with the elderly men and women from the geriatrics ward and did follow-up work with alcoholics who came to the hospital for treatment. She fed some of those who needed help and read stories to them. The Governor's Commission worked for months to formulate a comprehensive report to outline a plan for the care of the mentally afflicted in Georgia. The plan was to shift the emphasis away from the large institutions to the smaller, more intimate community mental health centers. They allowed those mentally ill to live at home, surrounded by loved ones, yet have somewhere to go during the day to learn and be cared for.³⁴ These centers increased from twenty-three when Jimmy was elected to one hundred thirty-four.³⁵ This is something that Rosalynn continued to fight as First Lady when Jimmy was elected President.

Another Rosalynn project was the Equal Rights Amendment. This was a controversial topic of the time, especially since it was believed by many that women were supposed to be dutiful housewives and mothers. During this period, men were considered the breadwinners of the family. They were the ones who maintained the job and provided for the family. On the other hand, women stayed home, cooked, cleaned, and cared for the children. The Equal Rights Amendment came to a vote in the Georgia House of Representatives in January 1974. Television programs were full of people in the street bra burning and women like Bella Abzug and Gloria

³⁴ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 94-95.

³⁵ Gerald N Grob, "Public Policy and Mental Illnesses: Jimmy Carter's Presidential Commission on Mental Health," *The Milbank Quarterly*, 2005.

Steinem releasing solid statements.³⁶ This was another critical issue that Rosalynn supported in Carter's presidency.

Rosalynn Carter took on the inadequacies and inequalities of the judicial system. She allowed prisoners to work in the mansion. Mary Fitzpatrick was a young trustee who worked in the mansion. Mary cared for Amy and Rosalynn. The Carters treated her as if she were family. Mary had been convicted of manslaughter after becoming involved in a shooting accident in Lumpkin, Georgia. She had not even seen her court-appointed lawyer until she was in the courtroom. He had persuaded her to plead guilty to a murder she did not commit. Pleading guilty, he told her, would get her a lighter sentence. Pleading not guilty would make everybody mad. Rosalynn worked with the Women's Prison Committee of the Commission on the Status of Women to secure a decent place for women prisoners to sleep. She also made arrangements with prison authorities to create a Work Release Center.³⁷ Rosalynn worked to get prisoners a better chance in the Georgia legal system. The *Associated Press* noted in an article that "Rosalynn Carter also went after lawyers who took advantage of prisoners by charging them retainer fees with fraudulent promises of parole. Jimmy Carter had gotten wind of the widespread practice as a state senator. Rosalynn went to the women's prison to gather details about the schemes. The Carters reported the attorneys to the Georgia State Bar Association."³⁸

Rosalynn Carter was a strong, independent woman who influenced many women throughout history. She was born in the small, isolated town of Plains, Georgia, to parents who taught her the values of education and religion. Dealing with the passing of her father at a young

³⁶ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 99.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 101-102.

³⁸ Bill Barrow, "Rosalynn Carter Made a Wrongfully Convicted Felon a White House Nanny and Helped Win Her Pardon," *AP News*, November 21, 2023.

age, she had to grow up fast and help her mother care for the family. With her bond with Jimmy, she found a love that created new heights for her and Americans in the future. With their passion, they made an influential warehouse business where Rosalynn crossed boundaries and worked while being a wife and mother. She expanded the role of women by keeping the ledgers and working with the customers who came into the business. While Jimmy decided to take up a political career, Rosalynn spread her wings. She became a political machine, standing by her husband and campaigning for him throughout Georgia. Once elected to the Governorship, she took on her own passions. She shared her passion for the issues she cared about to make Georgia a better place for its citizens. This one-time small-town girl broke through her shy interior to become an independent girl who changed Georgia politics and would soon be going on to change national politics.

Chapter 4

The Election of 1976

There has always been a story of an underdog in historical events. Will the underdog rise to the occasion and take the top spot, or are they doomed to remain at the bottom of the barrel while the favorites take the top spot? Darwin referred to this situation as survival of the fittest. Can the underdog adapt to the skills necessary to survive and thrive in their environment? The fittest readily takes the resources required to achieve greatness and ultimate success. Throughout American political history, public opinion has often rooted for the underdog. When events in historical tides or political arenas are set, public attention may not follow the trajectory in rooting for the candidate viewed as the “leader of the pack.” Public support may be for the less likely candidate for the job. The person that starts at the bottom pulls themselves up by their bootstraps, sneaking in through unusual predicaments, and then suddenly finds themselves centered in the limelight of historical glory. This was the case in the election of 1976. Jimmy Carter was the underdog of the election cycle. The dark horse from Plains, Georgia, a southern state where no resident had ever been elected President. Tides were turning throughout the United States during the political cycle to elect someone from outside Washington, D.C., and through Jimmy Carter’s campaign appeal, he sealed the deal with the American public to become the next President of the United States.

The appeal to attract voters of diverse backgrounds allowed Carter to connect with Americans through the commonality of mutual appreciation and time-tested morals. He could also connect to his constituents on various social fronts. The *New York Times* noted, “But the Carter campaign, more than any other, is based on the premise that this year, issues matter less than the American psyche- that the way to win is to persuade the people that “precious things” like truth and brotherhood and idealism and pride in the country can yet be regained. Mr. Carter

seems to have made the restoration of the people's faith in themselves his primary campaign strategy."¹ He included in his resume being a businessperson, a southern farmer, a nuclear engineer, a naval officer, and a community leader. He was an all-around Washington outsider with an impeccable resume who also had the experience needed to be a leader of the free world. Jimmy graduated sixtieth in a class of more than eight hundred students at the U.S. Naval Academy. He had ambitions to become the US chief of naval operations one day. He was deeply disappointed when he was rejected for a Rhodes scholarship. But in 1953, he left his Navy days behind when his father died and returned to Plains to manage the family peanut farm. He began entering local politics as soon as he returned, and in three years, he was serving on the county school board and the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce; he was vice president of the Plains Lions Club, a Sunday school teacher at Plains Baptist Church, and scoutmaster of his son's troop. In 1962, he won the state senate election as the more progressive candidate in the race. As a senator, he avoided racial controversies and focused on economic development. He developed a reputation as being one of the hardest-working senators. He vowed on the campaign trail to read every bill before it came up for a vote. Therefore, he had to take a speed-reading course to read the thousand bills considered in each legislative session to fulfill his promise. He could reach the American public on assorted topics of the day. During his first year as governor on the campaign trail in Salt Lake City, Utah, Jimmy Carter noted an incident that resonated with voters on his candidate appeal.

I was invited to come in for the banquet session during my first year as governor to a kind of wrap up what they had heard that day about planning their career. The young man who introduced me had done a great deal of research on my background, and he got up and said, "We're very proud to have tonight Governor Jimmy Carter come and explain to us how to plan our life's career. He was born and raised in Plains, Georgia, where he finished high school. He went to Georgia Southwestern College, where he studied chemistry. Then he went to Georgia Tech, where he studied engineering, and then he

¹ Tom Wicker, "Jimmy Carter's Appeal-," *The New York Times*, April 25, 1976.

went to the U.S. Naval Academy, where he got a degree in marine science, and then he went to Schenectady, New York, to Union College to do advanced work in nuclear physics, and now, he grows peanuts for a living, and he's here to tell us how to plan our life's career."²

Another aspect Carter had going for him, which he turned into an advantage, was that he was from the Deep South. No resident from Georgia had ever won the presidency. It was time to change the perspectives of the Southern presidential candidates. Just like in the 1960 Presidential race, when the American public was suspicious of voting for an Irish Catholic in John F. Kennedy, the time was now coming for tested change with a breath of fresh air. *The New York Times* noted in an article that if Carter had won the presidential election of 1976, he would have been the first Democratic presidential candidate since John F. Kennedy in 1960 to have dislodged an incumbent Republican administration. It also noted that Carter's strategy and political problems were similar to Kennedy's as an outsider who began to consolidate interest groups, expose honorable ideas, and invoke the parties' past. The *Times* noted the comparisons of the Kennedy and Carter presidential runs by stating:

In 1960, Kennedy had an easier time because after the tranquil Eisenhower years, many social problems were emerging, but few were at the boiling point. He could therefore sketch out the path to a New Frontier" in generalized terms and still sound credible. Carter is running after years of turmoil, demagoguery, and distrust. Major issues such as crime, inflation, unemployment, health insurance, welfare, and tax reform have been repeatedly and angrily thought out and repeatedly stalemated. In these circumstances, it is harder to avoid specifics and to strike a plausible balance between liberal innovation and conservative caution. Too many issues are too sharply defined.³

Carter did not hold office while he campaigned for the Presidency. This gave him a leg up in the race. He had more time to tour the country and be seen by the constituents on the ground while

² Carter, Jimmy, "Remarks at a Campaign Appearance in Salt Lake City, Utah," *The American Presidency Project*, October 7, 1976, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-campaign-appearance-salt-lake-city-utah>.

³ William V. Shannon, "Carter and the J.F.K. Model," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1976,

the members of Congress he was running against were attending to their responsibilities in Washington. This came with a double-edged sword. Yes, Carter could cover more ground, but his opponents had a larger canvas to expose their beliefs; they also had more national name recognition in some cases, so they had the news media ready as a platform for their campaign time. This allowed them an advantage in reaching people from the comfort of their doorstep in Washington. Another point of reference was that national news media coverage was based in Washington; D.C. Carter had to fight for national news coverage. The only political capital he had in his name was that of a one-time governor of Georgia. One aspect that Carter knew would be a political fault was his unwillingness to compromise on his moral principles. He valued the opinions of others around him and took their counsel, yet when it came to his passion, he had a hard time swaying from his morality of conscience. ⁴

The American political and social structure changed throughout the 1970s, a decade spanning ten years. With the resignation of President Nixon due to the Watergate scandal on August 9, 1974, a political vacuum was positioned in Washington, D.C. Nixon left Ford as the American nation's leader. Ford had never won a national election or even a statewide election. President Ford had served as a Michigan congressman for decades before becoming Nixon's vice president. Yet, he had not been on the presidential ticket with Nixon during his reelection campaign in 1972. He was placed in office due to the 25th Amendment after Nixon's Vice-Presidential candidate, Spiro Agnew, resigned in disgrace. The American public was disgusted with politicians who sought political power for capital gain. Power-hungry politicians were not what the American public was seeking in the election of 1976. They were finding themselves

⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best? The First Fifty Years* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 178-180.

looking for the American conscience and pulse of the nation to return. Gerald Ford later caused a political flop when he pardoned Nixon for his Watergate scandal.

The American public was not ready to let Nixon off the hook for his transgressions. Therefore, Ford politically ruined his career. The energy crisis of 1973 and the following stagflation were on the minds of the American people as to who would help boost the economy and bring down the high unemployment rate. Women in America were starting to come to the forefront of the American political arena. Vital legislative items were hitting the political scene. *Roe v. Wade* took place, which legalized abortion across the nation. This was the first piece of legislation that divided the country on women's reproductive issues. Does a woman have the right to take control of her body and have the right to choose? Or, at the time of conception, is the fetus considered a living, breathing human, and, therefore, are the rights entailed as one? The Equal Rights Amendment, or the ERA, was a significant campaign issue. Do women have equal rights apportioned to them the same as men? Or, in the eyes of the constitution, are women seen as a lesser figure than men? Not to mention, the social institution of marriage was challenged in the decade of the 1970s. This was the first time that gay rights activists were fighting for partisan recognition for their cause. Do people who love the same sex have a right to marry? Not to mention, the political fallout from Vietnam was occurring in the bounds of Washington, D.C., as U.S. troops returned home, and Saigon fell in South Vietnam.⁵ People around the country were asking why America went to Vietnam at all. What was the point of fighting the war when America had just retreated, and communism took over?

⁵ Daniel K. Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical: Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and the Presidential Contest of 1976* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020, n.d.), 1-2.

When Jimmy Carter began stumping at various locations, he questioned the very heart of the moral fibers that ran through the core of the American people. Through his “Two Questions” speech, he asked America two fundamental questions about the roots of American minds during the 1970s. “Can our government be honest, decent, open, fair, and compassionate? Can our government be competent?”⁶ The questions that Carter was hitting at hit the moral compass of American questions during the fight for office. Politicians were no longer striving to have a personal relationship with the American people. They were so far removed from what the people wanted or needed. They were seated in the coziness of their plush offices in Washington, D.C., away from the daily lives of the people they served. It was time for the politicians to unite with their constituents and bridge the gap. The confidence of the politicians was lost. They were not known to the American public and had become hidden behind the grand halls of the Capitol. To ensure that honesty and trustworthiness could reign supreme again, the government needed to extend an olive branch of open communication. Instead of being surrounded by a cloud of secrecy, the government needed to be run through open communication with the American public. Through the complete revelation of all business and financial involvements of major officials and exclusive access to special interests, the American public would not doubt what was going on behind closed doors.

Also, anyone elected to office, such as a federal judge, diplomat, or other prominent official, should be done so on merit. No longer should there be political favors for political jobs, but jobs should be held for the merit of the office, not the spoils system. Carter said that the government's competency could be corrected simply. Straight-line and minimize the office of the government. Streamline the departments to those only necessary by cutting out the intermediary

⁶ Carter, *Why Not The Best*, 185.

and having jobs that are only necessary for carrying out the jobs. Remove all red tape jobs to streamline the process. The government would be more effective in maintaining the processes and carrying out jobs if it only had to go through necessary channels.⁷

Candidates in the election of 1976 had mountains to climb regarding the election cycle. In 1975, only 28 percent of America approved of the way the United States Congress was completing its day-to-day tasks.⁸ The faith in American democracy was shaky as Americans were losing respect for the institution in which their elected representatives were bound to serve them. Polls showed the younger generation was more willing to use the split ticket method in the upcoming election. However, a growing number of young voters refused to identify with any party at all. The National Election Studies surveys showed 37 percent of American voters in 1976 called themselves Independents, an uptick from 28 percent ten years earlier.⁹ However, the most concerning factor was that many eligible voters simply boycotted politics by refusing to show up at the polls for anything. Candidates had many avenues to prepare for the election of 1976. Not only did they have to maintain their base, but they also had to electrify the undecideds, the Independents, and the moderates, and now try to reach some of the non-voters. With so much disdain for politics, politicians in the air candidates had an uphill battle to climb.

Strategy would be the key to how they would reach the American voters. Also happening in the election of 1976 was the first time there was a change to the campaign finance rules. There was a strict limit on fund-raising and expenditure. Under the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, no one could donate more than \$1,000 to a presidential candidate, and no candidate could

⁷ Carter, *Why Not The Best*, 186-188.

⁸ "Poll Finds Support for Congress Low," *The New York Times*, July 21, 1975.

⁹ "1976 Time Series Study - Anes: American National Election Studies," *American National Election Studies*, March 28, 2023, <https://electionstudies.org/data-center/1976-time-series-study/>.

spend more than \$10 million in the primaries and another \$12 million in the general election. This rule was to help the dark horse candidates, appeal to popularity, and limit access to big donors and corporate wealth. Another rise in party politics that changed the game in the 1976 election was the change in the DNC's rules governing party primaries. In the 1970's, party primaries meant little in the election's grand scheme. Only a few states had them since convention delegates were not bound to vote by their state's primary results. The real work for the nomination of a candidate came at the convention level, not at the primary level. For example, John F. Kennedy secured his party's nomination in 1960 after winning only three primaries, and Hubert Humphrey did so in 1968 after winning none. In 1976, any candidate who received at least 15 percent of the votes in a state primary could win a share of the state's delegates. In 1976, thirty states were expected to hold primaries, and the others planned to hold caucuses open to grassroots party members. Lastly, another reason 1976 was so exciting to candidates was the appeal that it gave candidates a chance to remake the nation's politics. After years of turmoil and scandal, the new President would be able to shape the moral and social fibers of the American agenda for the next decade, bringing a new spirit of renewed energy to the country. ¹⁰

The Democratic Party was separated into two main camps at the beginning of the 1976 election cycle as the members of the Democratic Party were testing the definition of liberal. "Was a liberal someone who favored protecting labor unions and promoting large government spending programs, such as the New Deal and the Great Society, while opposing the feminist and antiwar movements? Or were liberals those people who opposed the Vietnam War and

¹⁰ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 10-13.

supported civil rights for African Americans, even if labor unions meant little to them?”¹¹

Younger, white, college-educated voters were being pitted against older, religiously conservative, lifelong Democrats. Everyone saw the deep rifts in the party, but no one knew how to mend them.

George Wallace ran in the Democratic Presidential primary. Wallace had run for president three times before the election of 1976, and he had more name recognition than any other candidate in the field. He was known for being the governor of Alabama, which intervened in civil rights conflicts and heightened racial tensions that led to violence and death. One such incident was when federal courts ordered the desegregation of the University of Alabama in June 1963, and Wallace fulfilled his campaign promise to stand in the schoolhouse door to block African American students from entering. President John F. Kennedy federalized state troopers to force the registration of two black students, and Wallace stepped aside.¹² George Wallace suffered an assassination attempt during his 1972 presidential campaign that left him paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair. An article in the *New York Times* in November of 1974 stated that he was in “tragically weak physical shape” that was consumed by massive hearing loss and rapidly deteriorating eyesight in addition to numerous disorders.¹³ At all of Wallace’s previous campaign rallies during 1968 and 1972, he was known for drawing big crowds attended by tens of thousands of people.¹⁴

¹¹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 14.

¹² “Wallace, George C.,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, March 11, 2024, <https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/george-c-wallace-1963-67-1971-79-1983-87/>.

¹³“With Teddy out and New Rules in, You Can’t Tell the Democratic Players without a Playbill,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 1974.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

However, during the 1976 election, Wallace took the direct mail approach to campaigning. He was finding it more effective as he mailed his supporters his goals and principles, and those same people who would rally alongside him and the stump trails rallied beside him from the comfort of their living room. Wallace tapped into his mailing list of two million supporters from his 1972 campaign to 1976. He solicited the advice of Richard Viguerie, considered the national master of direct-mail fundraising in 1975. As a result, Wallace raised \$3 million in 1975 after paying \$2 million for fund-raising costs. Ninety-two percent of the money came from donations of less than \$100, with most contributions amounting to no more than \$25. Wallace received an average of two thousand pieces of mail daily and was already getting about \$1,500 daily in small donations by November 1974. Wallace portrayed himself in his fund-raising letters as the candidate of the ordinary person. He embraced the slogan “Trust the people.” Wallace, once a supporter of abortion rights, found a new pro-life position as he was the only major Democratic contender in the 1976 election to support a constitutional amendment to ban abortion. Wallace also pushed for school prayer, denounced the proliferation of pornography, lashed out at bloated welfare rolls, called for the return of the death penalty, and advocated a law-and-order side to approaching crime. On the foreign policy side, he denounced foreign aid programs and détente and promised a strong hawkism stance against communism. Wallace was a formidable opponent, but the field of the democratic primary was filled with other keynote takers of the day.¹⁵

Henry “Scoop” Jackson was another candidate who threw his hat in the ring during the Democratic primaries of 1976. Senator Henry M. Jackson was from Washington State, yet he was known to his friends and supporters as “Scoop.” He was the oldest Democratic candidate in

¹⁵ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 16-17.

the race, as he turned sixty-four in 1976 and had the longest political career of any of the other candidates. Scoop Jackson had been in Congress since 1941 and had taken a run for President once before, unsuccessfully in 1972. He had staunch supporters in the labor unions, Jews, and many northeastern Catholics. Jackson earned a reputation as a senator who was intelligent, hardworking, and an expert in many fields, especially defense and energy. This proved productive if he won, as the nation was in the wake of a massive energy crisis. A *New York Times* article on March 26, 1976, showed Jackson's record as a New Deal-Fair Deal Democrat. The author acknowledged his substantial liberal credentials on most domestic issues during his thirty-five years in Congress. However, the 63-year-old Senator Jackson had been consistently characterized as a conservative in recent years.¹⁶ His overall message for the 1976 campaign was to help the economy. He said he would pressure Congress for government jobs programs and greater economic intervention to secure full employment. Jackson supported the Vietnam War for its entirety, and even though the war was over, he called for an increase in defense spending to continue the fight against communism around the globe. Many Americans were not thrilled with this policy. They believed that Vietnam was a costly, avoidable war.¹⁷

Edward "Ted" Kennedy was another Democratic hopeful on the nomination ticket for the Democratic primary ticket. He was the man that Americans thought could bridge the divide between the old and new left. He was everyone's frontrunner. Ted reminded the country of his brother Jack, and they hoped he could restore the country to its former greatness before the cultural conflict of the 1960s and the economic stagnation of the 1970s. Kennedy was the voice in the Senate for universal health care and advocated for civil rights. There was so much wistful

¹⁶ Douglas E. Kneeland, "Jackson Is Edging toward the Left," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1976.

¹⁷ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 20-24.

nostalgia for JFK's Camelot and Bobby's unfinished campaign that Democrats of all ideological backgrounds wanted to trust Ted Kennedy to save the country. However, on September 23, 1974, Ted Kennedy took himself out of the race and stated he "could not make a full commitment to the campaign for the Presidency." However, many Americans and historians have noted that the scandal of Chappaquiddick pulled Kennedy out of the race. *The Washington Post* said it best in an article written in 1979: "Chappaquiddick is a ticking political time bomb." Some see it in terms of an automobile accident where a human being died while a senator did not contact the authorities in time to attempt to save her. Others, see it as a morality issue, because you have a married senator out with a single young woman. While others, see it as a cover-up of massive proportions, despite Kennedy's denials. He stated he knew nothing of the accident."¹⁸ Having his family relive that in the public spotlight by his opponents would have been too much of a burden on his family.¹⁹

Morris "Mo" Udall was another Democratic hopeful in the election of 1976. He was an Arizona congressman who was often self-deprecating and candid about his chances at the office of the President. He frequently joked about the prospects of a candidate named Mo Udall being elected to the nation's highest office. He took a right-based issue stance on human equality for clean government, environmentalism, and peace. He also was a strong proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment. Udall also had a unique fact about him and his religious faith. He came from an extensive line of Mormons and had been raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. However, when he was a young man serving in World War II, he broke with the church because of its opposition to equality for blacks and, therefore, had not been a practicing member

¹⁸ Martin Schram, "Chappaquiddick: Milestone of Uncertain Weight," *Washington Post*, November 13, 1979.

¹⁹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 26-30.

for years. Udall entered the race without much money and little name recognition. He had to build his base amongst the characters that were around him.²⁰

Fred Harris was one of the last Democratic hopefuls in the Democratic primaries of 1976. He was a forty-four-year-old one-term senator from Oklahoma who had run unsuccessfully in 1972 and was now casting himself as the most liberal candidate. Harris's campaign quickly foundered because of a lack of funds and an inability to expand his support base beyond a small group of left-leaning young people. He was correct in that Watergate Democratic voters wanted a candidate who was not following the trappings of Washington's power. However, he failed to provide that feeling and agenda to the American public.²¹

Jimmy Carter was a Southerner, and southern Democrats had not been taken seriously as presidential candidates in recent elections due to civil rights legislation. The last two times the country had elected a president from the Deep South was in 1848, when General Zachary Taylor of Louisiana won on the Whig ticket, and in 1964, when Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas won on the Democratic ticket. After the election of 1972, Jimmy Carter's twenty-eight-year-old aide, Hamilton Jordan, sent him a fifty-three-page memo detailing how he could win the next presidential race. Carter was less than two years into his governorship of Georgia with no sight set on the Presidency. Jordan told Carter, "Perhaps the strongest feeling in this county today is the general distrust and disillusionment of government and politicians at all levels. The desire and thirst for strong moral leadership in the nation were not satisfied by the election of Richard Nixon. It is my contention that this desire will grow in four more years of the Nixon

²⁰ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 34-35.

²¹ *Ibid*, 37.

administration.”²² Therefore, when Carter started his political strategy in the presidential election cycle, he decided to base his campaign not on issue positions or his political record but on his moral character. When other candidates ran on their governmental resumes, progressive issues, or cultural appeals, Carter campaigned that his character and biography made him best suited to deliver the “moral leadership” that had been missing in Washington, D.C. For this, Carter stated that he was not a Washington politician. All presidential candidates of the past half-century, except for General Dwight Eisenhower, had come from the Senate, the presidential cabinet, the vice presidency, or they had served as governors of populous states such as New York. Carter noted in his biography that he was not cut from the same cloth. He was from the Deep South, with ties to a peanut farm. His campaign commercials portrayed him as an average American on his peanut farm, with rolled-up sleeves and blue jeans atop a tractor.²³ He did not have national name recognition like some candidates he ran against. The Carter team created a *Jimmy Who?* film for the 1976 election that introduced Carter to voters during the primary season and was updated as the race progressed. It told his background and highlighted what the American people thought about him.²⁴ It was also noted that in 1973, Carter appeared on *What’s My Line?* none of the panelists recognized him.²⁵ Another strong catalyst in Jimmy’s storyline was that when he told his mother he was running for President, her first response was “President of what?” Carter was as far removed from Washington politics as any other candidate was in the Democratic poll

²² Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 40-41.

²³ The living room candidate - commercials - 1976 - bio, accessed June 1, 2024, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976/bio>.

²⁴ “Jimmy Who?,” *C-SPAN*, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?409401-1%2Fjimmy-who>.

²⁵ “Jimmy Carter on ‘What’s My Line’,” Accessed from Game Show Network, *YouTube video*, 0:48, December 18, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOCc4osMXiI>.

in 1976. Leaning on his regional roots and religious devotion, Carter used those affiliations to boost his morale and candidacy. Carter was just a small-town Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher from Georgia. Who would have dreamed that a Sunday School teacher versus men surrounded by scandals and corruption, such as Watergate, would face off over issues of moral conscience? This brought America to heel over which direction they wanted to go for the future of the new generations. While America had drifted into a scandalized and corrupted nation, Carter idealized the period when America was living in a world of “Mayberry,” where life was more straightforward, and morals were steadfast. However, he still projected an image of youthful vitality and business-minded efficiency that voters were drawn to as a new voice to lead America into a new dawn.²⁶

When examining Carter for the position of American president, he passed all the tests for having a superb reputation. On the religious front, Carter was a Southern Baptist. He faithfully attended church every Sunday and served as a deacon and a Sunday school teacher. His Southern Baptist faith influenced his views on many issues that he would face in his political career, such as the *Roe V. Wade* decision on abortion, supporting public schools, appointing women to positions of power, and calling for a Palestinian homeland. His bond with his wife, Rosalynn, was extraordinary; they had a strong, private, and professional bond. Carter treated Rosalynn as his co-equal in all matters, political partner, and confidant. He drank little and was never seen under the influence. Even though he was in the Navy during a time when cigarettes were ubiquitous, he did not smoke. He considered a campaign for Congress but decided to run for governor in 1966. Carter strengthened some of his key positions during his time in Georgia politics. He became deeply committed to the cause of both civil rights and poverty relief. These

²⁶ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 40-43.

ideals were felt in the presidencies of other vital Democratic leaders, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He strengthened his passion for governmental efficiency. He implemented zero-based budgeting, which required each state agency to offer a line-by-line defense of its budget requests rather than simply asking for a specific percentage increase based on previous expenditures. He wanted to ensure he used taxpayers' money more efficiently to fund necessary programs. Carter also took a solid approach to women's rights at a time when many conservative Southern Baptists opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and women's ordination.²⁷ Carter was ready to take some outside of the Washington era approaches and sweep them into Washington politics to freshen up the cultural, social, and political climate of the time.

Carter's campaign staff was made up of loyal members of Washington outsiders who thought he was the man who could shake up the Washington establishment. Most were fellow Georgians who had been part of his campaign team since at least 1970 if not 1966. Hamilton Jordan was the head of the campaign operations. He was born in Albany, Georgia, and was a focal point for civil rights protests during his senior year of high school. He was a political science major at the University of Georgia when he supported Carter's 1966 gubernatorial bid. Jordan believed that Carter would be able to unify the rural and urban South and bring about racial reconciliation to Georgia, even though it was still haunted by segregation. Jordan managed Carter's campaign for governor in 1970 and, two years later, encouraged Carter to run for President. Jody Powell was Carter's press secretary and a fellow South Georgia native. He had studied political science and was an early supporter of Carter's first gubernatorial bid in 1966. He also played a crucial role in his second campaign in 1970. Jordan and Powell were the soul of Carter's early campaign. They were the proofers of Carter's speeches. They coordinated

²⁷ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 42-47.

campaign strategy and formulated long-term goals. Lawyer Stuart E. “Stu” Eizenstat, from Atlanta, served as issues director for Carter’s 1970 gubernatorial campaign and performed the same role for his presidential bid. Rick Hutcheson, still attending graduate school, was brought in to plan campaign strategy and delegate outreach.²⁸ With this team of campaign staff around Carter, they created a unique approach that outlined Jimmy Carter as just who he was, the political anti-Washington candidate leading with his moral compass.

Carter officially announced his campaign for the presidency in December of 1974. The cornerstone of his announcement speech was not his call for government efficiency but his promise to restore trust in the nation’s government. This was coming at the heels of Nixon’s resignation and Ford’s pardon of Nixon from his dealings with the Watergate scandal. When Jimmy Carter accepted the nomination of the Democratic Party in July of 1976 at Madison Square Garden, he very eloquently opened the speech with his name and what he was running for. He established his reasons for accepting the nomination in the terms of his predecessor’s words that resonated with the American people, John F. Kennedy. He stated: “Nineteen seventy-six will not be a year of politics as usual. It can be a year of inspiration and hope, and it will be a year of concern, of quiet and sober reassessment of our nation’s character and purpose year when voters have already confounded the experts. And I guarantee you that it will be the year when we give the government of this country back to the people of this country.”²⁹ Carter denoted the history of his party and the work his predecessors had done for the country. He then outlined the work he wanted to see happen in the country as they shifted into a new generation of moral,

²⁸ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 50-51.

²⁹ Carter, Jimmy, “Our Nation’s Past and Future.” July 15, 1976, *Jimmy Carter Presidential Library*.

social, and political stations of life.³⁰ “It is time for us to take a new look at our own government, to strip away the secrecy, to expose the unwarranted pressure of lobbyists, to eliminate waste, to release our civil servants from bureaucratic chaos, to provide tough management, and always to remember that in any town or city the mayor, the governor, and the President represent exactly the same constituents.”³¹

Carter was a man who sparked debate on his issues. He drew in critics when it came to his stance on issues while also drawing in internal debate from some of the members of his camp. Other critics cited that they saw him as neither conservative nor liberal as he waffled or was fuzzed on issues. “Carter admitted that he had to straddle both liberal and conservative positions in order to appeal to a broad spectrum of the electorate, but in doing, he allowed his critics to attack him on his most vulnerable point during the campaign: his fuzziness on the issues.”³² Within his own camp, sometimes there was room for internal division. Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in his memoir *Power and Principle* that the U.S. paid a high price for public confusion and policy inconsistency in its emphasis on human rights.³³ He also denotes a time when Carter and himself disagreed on involving America in a military coup in Iran during the final weeks of the Shah’s rule. Brzezinski felt it was necessary. However, Carter did not.³⁴ He

³⁰ Carter, *Why Not The Best*, 198-199.

³¹ “‘Our Nation’s Past and Future’: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York City,” *The American Presidency Project*, July 15, 1976, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/our-nations-past-and-future-address-accepting-the-presidential-nomination-the-democratic>.

³² Michael G. Krukones, “The Campaign Promises of Jimmy Carter: Accomplishments and Failures,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, 1 (1985): 137.

³³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985).

³⁴ Edward R. Kantowicz, “Reminiscences of a Fated Presidency: Themes from the Carter Memoirs,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 16,4 (1986): 554-555.

called for a comprehensive, broad change in the tax structure. The plan called for lower taxes for middle- and low-income families while closing corporate tax loopholes, encouraging corporations to relocate manufacturing plants overseas. He pushed for middle- and working-class families' agendas, such as lower taxes, a balanced federal budget, lower inflation, and full employment. Carter was a progressive candidate regarding foreign policy, the environment, and civil rights. Carter had been slow to oppose the Vietnam War and called for a human rights-based foreign policy. He wanted to strengthen the détente, denuclearization, an end to the CIA to effect regime change, and greater caution in the use of military force. Carter endorsed *Roe v. Wade*, which garnered him as a pro-choice candidate on abortion. On the stance of marijuana, he favored the decriminalization of the drug. A 1977 *New York Times* article addressed the reasons for Jimmy Carter's policies toward the decriminalization of marijuana. Jimmy Carter's son Jack was dismissed from the Navy after he had been caught smoking it, and his other sons, Chip and Jeff, had both said they had experimented with it. Therefore, Jimmy Carter called for a civil penalty to replace the Federal law that provided for a \$5,000 fine and up to a year in prison for those found to possess any quantity of the substance.³⁵ For Vietnam draft evaders, he promised a "blanket pardon." He "strongly supported" the Equal Rights Amendment and endorsed federally funded daycare. As Carter noted in his proclamation for Women's Equality Day in 1977, "Strong action is needed to guarantee women total equality in areas of politics and government, education, employment and related benefits, health care, housing and justice. The needs, hopes, and problems of a complex society demand the talents, imagination, and dedication of all its citizens without regard to sex. As women achieve equality, men, too, are liberated from ancient

³⁵ James T. Wooten, "Carter Seeks to End Marijuana Penalty for Small Amounts," *The New York Times*, August 3, 1977.

prejudices and relieved of arbitrary barriers to personal fulfillment.”³⁶ He advocated gun control, although his stance was ridden with a requirement for handgun registration and a ban on “Saturday night specials” with a promise to leave hunting rifles alone.

Regarding school integration, he supported busing to achieve integration but insisted that student participation must be voluntary. This view came from his time on the school board dealing with integration issues while in Georgia and his lessons from his mother, who knew no color lines. Then, on the controversial issue of the death penalty, he supported the use of the penalty in limited circumstances.³⁷

When it came time for the Democratic primaries, there were no clear frontrunners between the candidates. The press tainted Jimmy Carter and Mo Udall as dark-horse candidates whose chances of a first-ballot victory at the convention were a long shot. Henry Jackson and George Wallace, who had the longest resumes of all the candidates, separated the Democratic voters on the line of issues. Most Democratic voters still hoped that Ted Kennedy would enter the race, even though he had released a statement bowing out. Three more hopefuls entered the Democratic arena come primary time.

Sargent Shriver had been the Democratic Party’s vice-presidential candidate in 1972. He was also the founding director of the Peace Corps and the Office of Economic Opportunity director during the Johnson administration as the chief implementer of the War on Poverty. The American public expected him to run as a presidential candidate because of his closeness to the Kennedy family. When he started filling his campaign staff, he did so with the Kennedy family members and veterans of President Kennedy’s administration, using his connections to the

³⁶“Proclamation 4515-Women’s Equality Day, 1977,” *The American Presidency Project*, August 26, 1977, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-4515-womens-equality-day-1977>.

³⁷ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 62-64.

Kennedys to raise money more quickly than most of his rivals. However, the voters knew the distinction and did not classify him with the Kennedy name. Shiver had never won an elected office at any level; therefore, he was ill-prepared for a presidential run.³⁸

Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana was what the press deemed the frontrunner they had been waiting for. He supported the Equal Rights Amendment as chair of the Senate Constitutional Amendments Subcommittee, which he helped draft. Bayh also coauthored Title IX and helped block proposals for an antiabortion constitutional amendment in committee. His record on women's rights was impeccable. He also had a reputation in Washington as a defender of labor interests and civil rights.³⁹

The Iowa primaries became a heated contention ground for the 1976 election, establishing which dark horse candidate would rise. For a front runner, they presented an elevated risk because they typically attracted no more than about 10 percent of eligible voters. It was easy for specialized interest groups to pack the caucuses and exercise influence, swinging the vote to a dark-horse candidate. Iowa polls had shown Carter ahead three months leading up to the January caucuses, but he posed a danger to his candidacy if he underperformed in the caucuses. Fred Harris moved his national campaign manager from Washington to Des Moines for the last two weeks of the Iowa campaign. He then started to travel the state's roads in a rented camper. He covered hundreds of miles in the cold January weather to bring his message of what he could do for the American people to the Iowa voters. Even though his campaign was in financial troubles, he bought more radio and television advertising in Iowa than any of his rivals and stationed thirty-one national staff members in the state to help drum up support for his

³⁸ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 124.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 126.

presidency. Birch Bayh did not purchase as much media advertising as Harris but capitalized on a group of Democratic voters, Carter's weakest point, which was organized labor. However, Carter was running high with union leaders in Iowa because they felt he had a more widespread appeal than Bayh, and they wanted a candidate who could overtake Wallace in the primaries and win the White House. Another critical issue in Iowa was the issue of abortion. Iowa had a larger-than-average population of evangelicals compared with other northern states; therefore, Carter's faith played well with voters. Pro-life activists viewed Shriver as a flip-flop on abortion, and Bayh, Udall, and Harris were unacceptable; Carter was the only option. Carter's campaign of volunteers and supporters in Iowa included several Catholic pro-life activists, devout evangelicals, and at least one Catholic priest. Just a few days before the caucuses, Carter solidified his already strong position among pro-life. Activists suggested that he might endorse antiabortion legislation. Standing the test of time, his official work was that he did not support the Human Life Amendment. However, right before the caucuses, during a question-and-answer period with some pro-life activists, he answered the question a little differently. He was asked whether he supported the Human Life Amendment and replied that he did not, just as he always had. However, as a follow-up question, he was asked if he would support a more limited constitutional amendment that imposed the same restrictions on abortion that Georgia had before 1973, such as a nationwide ban on elective abortions that were not medically necessary while allowing limited exceptions for abortions in case of rape, incest, and health concerns. This was where Jimmy Carter started to confuse the American public with his stance on the issue of abortion. He responded that under certain circumstances, he would agree. When the caucuses were over in Iowa, Carter came out on top, winning 28 percent of the vote; Bayh was second with 13 percent; Harris was third with 10 percent; Udall was fourth with 6 percent, and Jackson,

who chose to bypass Iowa came in last with 1 percent of the vote. However, the real ordeal from Iowa was the conscience crisis created for Jimmy Carter. Carter's rivals and the press started to raise questions about his honesty in Iowa. Carter had always stated that he opposed all antiabortion constitutional amendments, so why then did Carter state right before the vote that he might be able to get behind some version of an antiabortion constitutional amendment? Carter brushed off the press and his critics by saying he had not lied. By his comment, he meant "a general law that would take preventive steps to minimize dependence on abortion by offering education programs, family planning programs, contraceptive advice, and availability and adoption procedures."⁴⁰ Even though Carter kept protesting that he had not lied and he was sticking to his original stance on the issue, the press was convinced that Carter was dishonest to the pro-lifers in Iowa. They claimed that Carter's stunt ultimately caused the difference between first and second place in the primaries.⁴¹ A 1976 *Washington Post Article* claimed that Carter's strategists had made two miscalculations with the abortion strategy in Iowa: by allowing Jimmy Carter to think that he could shift the Roman Catholic hierarchy's attention away from abortion toward commonly held social welfare positions and that he could appease the hierarchy by making clear for the first time that he would not as President actively oppose an anti-abortion constitutional amendment.⁴² Carter would be surrounded by a cloud of political vagueness for the rest of the primaries. In a *Washington Post Article* written in July of 1976, there was a consensus among delegates of the Democratic National Convention: the delegates were highly uncertain about the stand Jimmy Carter took on many issues, but they believed he would win in November.

⁴⁰ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 139.

⁴¹ Ibid, 134-139.

⁴² Rowland Evans and, Robert Novak. "Carter's Shifting Abortion Strategy." *The Washington Post*. Sep 03, 1976.

This was taken from a poll of 407 delegates issued by the *Washington Post*. James King, an Ohio sociologist, commented on the paper, stating, "My primary reason for supporting him is his integrity and the effective way he revamped and reorganized government."⁴³ However, the overall message or tone of the delegates was the theme that Jimmy Carter was vague on his political message.

Carter leaned on his faith throughout the entire campaign trail. This was also a point of contention among the voters and his campaign team. How would the American people feel about a presidential candidate who was intertwined with his Christian faith? During the election cycle, the Southern Baptist Convention had astronomically grown to thirteen million members. It was continuing to expand by adding thousands of new members each week. In every region of the country and every social class, 1976 was named the "Year of the Evangelical" by *Newsweek*. The growing population of the Christian faith was touching the world. However, the evangelical faith was experiencing the same revolution as the rest of the world. They were divided amongst regional, cultural, and political lines. In the North, many were Republicans, and in the South, they tended to be Democrats. For example, the country's best-known evangelical, Billy Graham, was a registered Democrat, but as far as presidential candidates, he tended to favor Republican candidates. Carter stated that he was not out to create a "Christian nation" by biblical standards. He only saw the Christian faith as a vehicle for social justice, human rights, and personal morality. It was stated that in any other year, Carter would have seen different results from the evangelical block of voters. However, in 1976, most evangelicals cared more about presidential candidates' personal faith and ethical behavior than policy positions.⁴⁴ A *New York Times* article

⁴³ Lou Cannon and, Barry Sussman and Staff Writers *Washington Post*. "Delegates are Uncertain of Carter Stand on Issues: Vagueness Over Carter Views." *The Washington Post*. Jul 14, 1976.

⁴⁴ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 202-205.

stated that “The Rev. Dean M. Kelley, author of “Why the Conservative Churches Are Growing,” estimated the number of Christians who readily identify with Mr. Carter’s evangelical outlook at 40 million in a telephone interview. Others put it as high as 50 million.”⁴⁵

Carter created a platform of government reorganization and job creation that he denoted as “a new beginning.” He pushed for a government characterized by openness and efficiency. Ethnic reforms, full employment, low inflation, and a balanced budget were all part of his plan once in the White House. He included an endorsement of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill for job creation that was scheduled to include a year or two of economic growth that would be sufficient to make a balanced budget possible in the country. He also endorsed national universal health insurance, increased federal aid to cities and education, and more federal investment in transportation. Carter also called for increased environmental protection, energy conservation, and antitrust prosecution of large oil companies. Carter believed that Social Security payments should be increased, the income tax system should be made more progressive, and the welfare system should be overhauled. On the foreign front, Carter stated that defense spending should be reduced by up to \$7 billion annually but claimed it would not endanger American military preparedness. It would merely cut out unnecessary projects. He criticized the policy of *detente* for conceding too much to the Soviets, especially in Eastern Europe. He also promised to continue the arms reduction project and broaden *détente* while working toward eastern European states’ independence from Soviet control. Carter detailed that foreign aid needed to be reformed and expanded to reach more people with human needs. ⁴⁶ This platform covered various topics

⁴⁵ Kenneth A. Briggs, “Carter’s Evangelism Putting Religion into Politics for First Time since ’60,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 1976.

⁴⁶ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 222-224.

that would solidify the Democratic party and unite them for the common cause of beating the Republican ticket to the White House.

When it came time for Jimmy Carter to find a running mate for a Vice-Presidential candidate, his advisors recognized that he needed to pick a Northerner or Westerner to balance the ticket. Carter was polling unusually strong among Republicans, independents, and southern whites, but he was facing opposition from the left wing of his party. Carter had notions of what he was looking for in a running mate. Carter knew he needed someone familiar with Washington and Congress. Before the convention, he met with potential running mates and had them visit his home and tour Plains with him. “Fritz” Walter Mondale was the most compatible with Jimmy and had the most ambitious ideas about how the vice president could expand the role. They met in Jimmy’s mother Pond House to discuss taxes, welfare, education, transportation, the military, and relations with the Soviet Union, Israel, China, and other countries. They also had an opportunity to choose cabinet officers to serve with them once they were in the White House.⁴⁷

During the Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden in New York City, Carter used the platform to solidify his party and push his anti-Washington campaign onto the party. The 1976 convention was filled with fever and excitement as delegates felt they might finally take back the White House after the Nixon Ford years. The mainline speeches at the convention were a blend of Carter’s promises to restore government to “the people” and the pledge to produce full employment. The theme of the convention was very evangelical. The convention began with a keynote address by African American congresswoman Barbara Jordan,⁴⁷ a Texan, the first female African American keynoter at any major-party convention, who reminded the Democratic Party that their party was the “inclusive not an exclusive party” for all

⁴⁷ Carter, *Reflection*, 115-116.

people.⁴⁸ She was so enthusiastic that many wanted her on the Vice-Presidential ticket, which she declined. Coretta Scott King offered an address to which she quoted liberally from her husband's "I Have a Dream" speech, where she called on the Democrats to have a "commitment to human rights." At the end of the convention, Jimmy Carter had a minister who closed the convention in prayer; that minister was Martin Luther King Sr... He stated, "Surely the Lord sent Jimmy Carter to come on out and bring America back where she belongs."⁴⁹ After Martin Luther King Sr. spoke, the band played "We Shall Overcome," to which some delegates joined arms and sang the song in unison. The *New York Times*, in July 1976, ran excerpts of the major addresses delivered at the Democratic Convention, quoting the main points of restored confidence and the renewed partnership between the American citizens and the government that Jimmy Carter would provide.⁵⁰ Carter was able in his acceptance speech to retain the evangelical language and morality of the season by focusing on the theme of returning the government to the people so that it would represent their values.⁵¹ "Our country has lived through a time of torment. It is now time for healing. We want to have faith again. We want to be proud again. We just want the truth again."⁵² The dark horse candidate from Plains, Georgia, had clinched the nomination of the Democratic Party and was one step closer to the race for the White House.

⁴⁸ Barbara Jordan, "Barbara Jordan's Keynote Address before the Democratic National Convention, July 12, 1976," *The Portal to Texas History*, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph595528/1>

⁴⁹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 235.

⁵⁰ "Excerpts from Some of the Major Addresses Delivered at Democratic Convention," *The New York Times*, July 15, 1976.

⁵¹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 233-235.

⁵² "'Our Nation's Past and Future': Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York City," *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/our-nations-past-and-future-address-accepting-the-presidential-nomination-the-democratic>.

The Republican sector of the nation's political party was rivaling in its downfall during the election cycle of 1976. Richard Nixon had resigned from office before official impeachment charges could be brought on him in the case of the Watergate scandal in the tampering of the Democratic national headquarters. Gerald Ford was instated as President of the United States but had never officially run for this office. Ford later committed an act that many Americans were resentful of during the time, pardoning Nixon for his crimes. America was not ready to forgive Nixon for his scandals and acquit him of his omissions of guilt. Therefore, Ford, by association, committed political suicide and lost political capital. When the election of 1976 surfaced, Ford had not decided if he would run for a full term, and some of his rivals assumed he would not. Senator Charles Percy had already announced his presidential campaign six months before Ford took office, and Governor Ronald Reagan was waiting to enter the race.

Early in 1973, Gallup polls favored Spiro Agnew at 35 percent of the Republican vote to win the 1976 election compared to the 20 percent garnered by Ronald Reagan and 15 percent by John Connally.⁵³ Spiro Agnew had the potential to appeal to all wings of the party and create a coalition like the one that had secured a Nixon landslide reelection victory. However, there was a downside to Agnew. His tone and rhetoric were harsh and mean-spirited compared to a presidential voice. Voters were split on whether to accept this tone as toughness or turn their back on him, as many Americans considered him unlikable. However, this did not stop Agnew from being the party's frontrunner for presidential contender in 1973, even though he was widely disliked outside his party. The downfall of Agnew would be his ethnic dealings rather than his harsh rhetoric.⁵⁴ A few weeks after Nixon's second inauguration, there was a federal grand jury.

⁵³ "Agnew Remains Top G.O.P. Choice," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1973.

⁵⁴ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 74-75.

In Baltimore, they started investigating charges that Agnew had received hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes during his term as governor of Maryland. In October of 1973, Agnew pleaded “no contest” to bribery and tax evasion charges and resigned as vice president. Therefore, his political career and his run for president were over.⁵⁵

Nelson Rockefeller tried for the presidential bid three times in the 1960s and was one of the party’s best-known candidates. He was a wealthy New York governor who advocated a progressive business approach that combined government support of corporate interests with a liberal stance on civil rights, abortion, women’s rights, and national health care. Rockefeller wanted to be president in 1960 but did not take steps to stop the Nixon train. Then, when he tried again in 1968, his divorce and his prompt remarriage to a much younger woman, his rumored mistress, helped to push the votes away from his camp.⁵⁶

Another political hopeful, Ronald Reagan, was a movie actor from the 1940s. He was originally a New Deal Democrat, whose opposition to communism and dislike for the postwar high taxes pushed him into the arms of the Republican Party. He was a popular governor of California with occasional tax increases and expansions of state government services, but he still opposed Washington’s deficit spending. Reagan’s main political message was that Washington’s system was broken and that federal spending was the cause of the nation’s economic problems. He believed that all of that could be fixed with the end of high taxation, federal regulations, and deficit spending that prevented the typical worker from enjoying their hard-earned money. Reagan was known as a great communicator as he lit up the room he was in with his charm and

⁵⁵ Spiro Agnew, Spiro Agnew and the Golden Age of Corruption in Maryland Politics: An Interview with Bew Bradley and Richard Cohen, *The Center for the Study of Democracy*, (Fall 2006), <https://www.smcm.edu/democracy/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2015/02/agnew-golden-age.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 76.

ability to win votes and raise money on the speaking circuit. In 1974, he raised \$1.5 million for the GOP by giving speeches nationwide.⁵⁷

Gerald Ford was the incumbent president who sought a full term in office. The main priority of his administration was to cut spending to bring inflation under control. His actions showed that he repeatedly vetoed spending bills that Congress sent him. During his first months in office, Ford made conservatives anxious by providing conditional amnesty to Vietnam War draft dodgers and expressing a willingness to endorse some form of national health insurance. However, the one thing that harmed Ford's public approval ratings over his presidency was pardoning Richard Nixon. This linked Ford to the corruption of his predecessor. What harmed Ford even more was the fact that he pardoned Nixon without a trial. At the time, only 36 percent of Americans agreed with Ford that Nixon should not be held in a trial. This put Ford in the firing range of the critics of the press. From then on, the press had a field day with Ford. The magazine *Harper's* pictured the president as Bozo the Clown, and *Saturday Night Live* comedian Chevy Chase began a series of skits about the president as a bumbler who accidentally stapled his ear or jammed pencils into his hands. Ford was also captured in various photos falling, whether on the ski slopes or while exiting Air Force One. His stumbling was shown as his ineffectiveness in being able to handle the American government.

Regarding the inflation problem, Ford decided it was a higher priority than unemployment. He believed fighting inflation would mean taking on the large government deficits that drove up interest rates. Ford also promised a balanced budget. However, the size of the deficit was the worst the country had seen since the 1940s. There became a blaming game between him and Congress for the root of the problem. Ford and his wife, Betty Ford, strongly

⁵⁷ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 82-85.

supported the Equal Rights Amendment, as he appointed pro-choice and pro-ERA Iowa Republican Mary Louise Smith as the first female chair of the Republican National Committee. However, Betty Ford made some political spoofs when in August of 1975 she called *Roe* “the best thing in the world a great, great decision” in an interview on CBS’s 60 Minutes.⁵⁸ The White House then became a constant source of picketing by pro-life activists for several months. Betty spoofed once again as she stated she would not object or be surprised if her eighteen-year-old daughter were having an affair, and she was sure her young adult children had “probably tried marijuana.”⁵⁹ She even took it one step further, saying that she would have tried it if it had been available during her time.⁶⁰ All these revelations would follow Ford into his march to obtain the nomination for the White House bid.

The Republican National Convention was to be held in Kansas City, and the mood of President Ford’s campaign staff was full of grim feelings. Towards the end of the primary season, Ford suffered a string of primary losses that led him to the convention, with insufficient delegates to win the presidential nomination. The convention, therefore, was a fight between Ford and Reagan to ensure delegates won the presidential bid. Each camp knew they would face odds never before seen in the general election against Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter, who was more popular than any Democratic presidential nominee since Franklin Roosevelt. As the two camps were, they could not have represented two regionally and ideologically different wings of the Republican Party. Their supporters had two distinct visions of where they wanted to

⁵⁸ Sixty minutes Interview Shown October 10, 1975, box 45, Betty Ford White House Papers, 1973-1977, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0018/81556868.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 89-99.

see America go in the new generation. When it came to a push for delegates, Ford had the advantage as he finished the primaries with more delegates than Reagan and was the incumbent president. He would invite delegates to the White House for formal receptions and photos with him to dazzle them with the star treatment. Reagan's camp was frustrated because they believed that coming out of the primaries, they had won more votes than Ford. However, they had fewer votes because of party rules and presidential influence over state delegations. However, the central notion amongst the Republican party was to put forth a candidate that could win the November election. Reagan thought he was the candidate for the job. He thought he was the only candidate who could compete with Carter for votes in the South, and he was the GOP's only hope for countering Carter's anti-Washington image. Ford responded that even if Reagan could counter Carter's strength, he was in no position to attack Carter's weakness, which was his inexperience. Ford believed he had the national governing record Carter lacked and was well poised on the issues that Carter was deemed "fuzzy." Ahead of the convention, something that rarely happened, Reagan's camp announced his running mate. This proved to be a costly error for the Reagan camp.

Reagan chose Ford's Pennsylvania delegate, Senator Richard Schweiker, as his running mate. His camp thought this would unify the Republican Party by appeasing the Ford moderates and help win some industrial states. However, what happened was it called into question the ideological principles of the Reagan campaign. It pushed his supporters into Ford's arms and crushed Reagan's support in the 1976 election.⁶¹ Ford then reigned supreme in the convention, and his next task was to choose a running mate for the general election. To unify the party, he relied on Ronald Reagan to help him select his vice president candidate, Bob Dole. Dole came

⁶¹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 239-244.

from a solid Republican home state of Kansas. His reputation as an aggressive attacker on the campaign trail helped as a potential contribution to the ticket. Dole had an impressive resume; he had served in Congress for fifteen years and was well-versed in policymaking and campaigning. He was also a decorated World War II combat veteran, where he sustained severe injuries and left his right arm permanently incapacitated. He served in the Kansas state legislature, the US House of Representatives, and the US Senate, where he chaired the Republican National Committee.⁶² With the addition of Dole to the ticket, Gerald Ford had claimed the Republican nomination and was off to the general election to face Jimmy Carter.

Jerry Rafshoon and Dr. Peter Bourne helped shape Jimmy Carter's political career. They outlined in detail, in 1972, how Jimmy could mount a campaign for president in 1976, filling the political middle ground between conservative George Wallace and liberal Ted Kennedy. Jimmy would share this letter with his press secretary, Jody Powell, and Hamilton Jordan. Rosalynn was also involved in the conversations. They had several meetings about how a campaign might be started despite Carter having little name recognition and little prospect of raising much money for the primary contest. Further down the line, Carter received a call one day from Dean Rusk. Rusk served as secretary of state under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He wanted to talk to Carter about the prospect of running for president. With encouragement from Rusk, doubts about being able to run for political office soon started to fade away. The Carter team began to study the new Democratic Party rules for primaries, the political situations in all fifty states, the names and attitudes of crucial news reporters, potential funding sources, and competitors. In January of 1975, Jimmy's term as governor ended. He immediately began to tour the country with Jody Powell, who took advantage of the state Democratic conventions and other

⁶² Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 262-265.

speaking opportunities. There was very little money; they only shared a hotel when they could not find a supporter's home with a spare bedroom. At first, it was slow because no one knew who he was or cared about politics. Iowa was the first main contention primary that Carter faced to win. Tim Kraft from New Mexico was hired as campaign manager in Iowa. He decided to have a press conference and reception in a Des Moines hotel. The campaign, therefore, rented a large ballroom and bought soft drinks, sandwiches, and cookies. However, only one reporter and three potential supporters came. Carter spoke to them, and then he, along with Jody Powell, walked to city hall and the county courthouse and handed out his campaign pamphlets in every office. While in contention for the Iowa caucus, Carter visited more than 120 Iowa communities and arranged meetings in people's homes and college classrooms. The Carter campaign was just looking for news coverage anywhere they went. One time, Jody took Jimmy to a TV station and asked him on the way if he had a favorite recipe, stating that he would have to dress up like a chef and be interviewed on a cooking show. Jimmy went along and donned an apron and white hat while talking to the audience about his favorite ways to prepare fillets of any kind of fish. After Jimmy began to win primaries, this video started to hit airtime a lot, along with his *What's My Line? Show*.⁶³

Carter received a most persistent question: "If elected, will you tell us the truth?" He decided to commit and he would tell his audiences "If I ever lie or even make a misleading statement, don't vote for me."⁶⁴ Depending on who Carter was addressing, he would talk about his experience as governor, his varied education background, his service in the navy, his knowledge of farming, or his commitment to managing the federal bureaucracy with a technique

⁶³ Carter, *Reflections*, 106-110.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

known as “zero-based budgeting.” He always allowed the audience to ask questions, which helped him include future discussion topics at his next stop. Rosalynn also played a crucial role in campaigning for Jimmy’s bid for the White House. She would drive from the community to the next stop at courthouses, newspaper offices, community events, and radio stations. She would tell everyone that her husband was running for president of the United States. If a reporter did not know anything about politics, it was noted that she would provide a written list of questions they could ask her, and she would respond with her answers. It became a family affair of campaigning because before long, they had seven separate family campaigns: Rosalynn, Jimmy, all three of their sons and wives, Jimmy’s mother, Lillian, and her youngest sister, Emily Dolvin. Rosalynn and Jimmy would usually meet in Plains and talk about their experiences on Saturdays, attend church on Sundays, and then go to Atlanta for strategy sessions. There was a formation called the “Peanut Brigade” of hundreds of Georgians who traveled around telling why Carter should be elected. ⁶⁵

Carter faced a Republican nominee who barely won his delegates' nomination. Ford had been hurt by political attacks from Reagan and his pardoning of Nixon, yet Carter never pressured him on those issues. Ford, during a debate, insisted that the Soviet Union did not dominate any of the East European countries occupied by Soviet troops—a severe misstep. Carter also suffered in an interview with *Playboy* magazine where he was explaining Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and he stated that he had “lusted” for women. ⁶⁶ During the summer of 1976, Jody Powell agreed for Carter to have an interview with *Playboy* to boost his polling

⁶⁵ Carter, *Reflections*, 111-112.

⁶⁶ Carter, “Interview with ‘Playboy’ Magazine,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/interview-with-playboy-magazine>.

numbers with cultural liberals who were suspicious of a Southern Baptist presidential candidate. Carter was ahead in the polls by 30 to 40 points; therefore, his camp thought this could rally some more votes. The interviewer was Robert Scheer, who was interested in questioning Carter about his relationship with his religion, moral values, and policy positions. Scheer wanted to know how Carter would wrap his religious conservative beliefs on sexual morality as a Democratic candidate for president. The interview's main scandal ended. When Scheer was packing up to leave, he stood at the door and asked Carter one final question, which he recorded. "Do you feel you've reassured people with this interview, people who are uneasy about your religious beliefs, who wonder if you're going to make a rigid, unbending President?"⁶⁷ Carter's response was lengthy to which he responded about humility, and the "almost impossible standards' set by Jesus to which he acknowledged that he too had sinned because he was "human and I'm tempted." Carter stated that he had lusted in his heart for other women. The press went wild as Carter had confessed to adultery in so many words. Reporters thought Carter had admitted to a secret sin. However, they had missed the key message of his story. Conservative Protestants viewed the interview as vile for talking to a pornographic magazine in the first place and then the interview itself. Carter was on the defensive and had to shore up the evangelical vote.⁶⁸

The Office of Public Opinion took a toll on Carter as he dropped 15 percentage points for the interview. Throughout the general election, Ford and Carter decided not to raise campaign funds from corporate or private contributors but to finance the general election campaigns from the dollar each taxpayer could designate. There was no money, therefore, nor wish to purchase

⁶⁷ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 293.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 291-294.

negative commercials. On Atlanta election night, Carter was surrounded by his family as they watched returns coming in from coast to coast. Carter carried most of the Eastern states, and Ford swept states in the West. Ford and Carter were tied until late returns from Mississippi came in last to give Carter a slight margin of victory in popular votes and 55 percent of the electoral votes.⁶⁹ Carter was now the next president of the United States.

Using political surrogates on the campaign trail was not a new concept. Before the campaigns of 1880, candidates did not actively seek the presidency. Nominees did not travel from state to state or city to city to tell voters where they stood on issues or solutions they had to problems in the county. Taking a page from George Washington's book, they remained above the political game and allowed their supporters and congressmen to reign in support of their bid for the President. Congressmen, Senators, and party workers did the heavy lifting during presidential campaigns as they traveled, spoke, and organized parades. With the inclusion of the 1880s, politicians stepped into the forefront of the political scheme with the idea of the front-porch campaign. From the comfort of his porch, James Garfield had thousands of visitors come to his 160-acre home to listen to his three to four-minute speeches on the issues and solutions he pondered for the country. This revolutionized the idea of campaigning as future presidential candidates hit the trail, but it did not stop the influence of political surrogates.⁷⁰ Political surrogates were vital in providing a character analysis of the politician in question. In the 1960s, the media started to saturate the campaigns due to the emergence of candidate-centered campaigns, then party-centered presidential campaigns, and the rise of the second women's

⁶⁹ Carter, *Reflection*, 117.

⁷⁰ "The Front Porch Campaign of 1880 (U.S. National Park Service)," National Parks Service, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/the-front-porch-campaign-of-1880.htm>.

movement. Candidate-centered campaigns focus on the candidates for office and their personalities and stance on issues. Who better to highlight those questions of character than the presidential candidate's wife? The connection between the presidential candidate was not just via issues, but it could be a relatability factor with American voters through the use of style, demeanor, children, or personality.⁷¹

From the conception of American democracy, the spouses of presidential candidates have played a role in the political process. During a period of American history where women were not granted the right to vote, when there were legal obstacles involving their rights of property ownership, inheritance, and divorce, soon to be, First Ladies found that through their marriage, they could become involved in the political agenda of the time. In 1808, Dolly Madison used her interpersonal skills as a hostess to curry favors with members of the House and Senate to gain support for her husband, James Madison, initial run for president. In the 19th Century, Mary Todd Lincoln, who had grown up with strong political alliances with Kentucky Whig Party figures like Henry Clay, was denoted to be a campaign adviser to her husband. When a grandstand was constructed in front of the Lincoln home in Springfield, Illinois, and crowds gathered to hear Lincoln speak, Mrs. Lincoln was seen inside the house, looking out and listening from the upper-floor window. 1860, when Lincoln heard he won, he yelled, "We are elected!"⁷² When President Grover Cleveland was running for his second term, his wife, Francis Cleveland, was exploited against Cleveland's wishes by supporters who used her image on

⁷¹ Susan A. MacManus and Andrew F. Quecan, "Spouses as Campaign Surrogates: Strategic Appearances by Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates' Wives in the 2004 Election," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 41, no. 2 (March 28, 2008): 337–48.

⁷² 2015 Carl Anthony on October 8, A brief history of first ladies in presidential campaigns, 1808-1904 (part 1), accessed June 11, 2024, <http://archive.firstladies.org/blog/a-brief-history-of-first-ladies-in-presidential-campaigns-1808-1904-part-1/>.

campaign posters. When President William McKinley was running for President, his wife Ida McKinley's public appearance before a large delegation of voters violated no societal expectation. This was because the events took place at their residence.⁷³ The role of political spouses as surrogates took off as they started to travel the country with their husbands and campaign on their behalf. Their roles as guides between their husband and the American people have shed light on the relationship between power and gender while showing a correlation between how American cultural expectations have evolved and what has remained the same. Only First Lady of note, in 1964, campaigned alone for her husband, Claudia ("Lady Bird") Taylor Johnson. Mrs. Johnson, while on the campaign trail for her husband Lyndon B. Johnson, understood the need for a good relationship with the members of the press, as journalism was one of her majors at the University of Texas. She aimed to shore up support for her husband in the southern states, where enthusiasm was weak, as she traveled to Washington and Louisiana on a train dubbed the "Lady Bird Special." Staff and advisers would accompany Mrs. Johnson and her daughters as she gave speeches along the way urging people to vote for her husband.⁷⁴ Rosalynn Carter used this example of surrogacy to stump for her husband, Jimmy Carter, while he campaigned for political office.

Rosalynn proved to be an indispensable asset to the Carter campaign. She campaigned for the Carter presidency with as much enthusiasm as Jimmy himself. She stopped at a few planned destinations, and they set out campaigning, stopping in every community, shaking hands, and passing out brochures. She aimed to get all the press she could by knocking on the doors of radio

⁷³ 2015 Carl Anthony on October 8, A brief history of first ladies in presidential campaigns, 1808-1904 (part 1), accessed June 11, 2024, <http://archive.firstladies.org/blog/a-brief-history-of-first-ladies-in-presidential-campaigns-1808-1904-part-1/>.

⁷⁴ Meredith Hindley et al., "Lady Bird Special," The National Endowment for the Humanities.

and television stations and newspaper offices and saying, "I'm Mrs. Jimmy Carter, and I thought you might want to interview me."⁷⁵ She soon overcame her nervousness as she realized that news of a presidential candidate, especially from the South, was a hot topic. The initial questions were where they were from, who Jimmy Carter was, and his experiences. Finally, Rosalynn made a list of issues for the journalists to focus on so they could delve deeper into his politics. Rosalynn learned critical points in the first few months of campaigning. Stop at courthouses because they were reliable sources of information. The court's sheriff or clerk could help learn about influential people in the community. Insist on the newspaper's front page; if that is not possible, at least the news section. Look for radio antennas that will lead to radio stations. Staying in people's homes helped be a listening ear to the constituents. They feel personally involved in the campaign and want to work for the cause. Have the courage to intrude on meetings, events, carnivals, and wherever people gather to hear your cause.⁷⁶

Rosalynn Carter was not afraid to go the extra mile for her husband. She was willing to listen to the American public and resonate with their stories. However, she was willing to take it a step further and turn their stories into action for the support of her husband. While stopping in Pennsylvania, she talked to a young coal miner with black lung disease. He was only thirty-six years old and had six children. When speaking to Rosalynn, he stated, "I'm too far gone to help, but tell your husband to do something to keep others from getting in my shape."⁷⁷ Rosalynn remembered this once in office, and with the help of her husband, Jimmy passed a bill that provided a new trust fund supported by an excise tax on coal to pay for black lung disabilities.

⁷⁵ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 120.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 121-123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 125.

Rosalynn visited convalescent homes, nursing homes, and other senior centers in each community and talked to the elderly about their problems. She visited day-care and mental health centers, rehabilitation programs for the handicapped, schools, shoe factories, and steel mills, listened, and learned, all while she answered questions. When she was confused by a question or did not know the answer, she would make a note and ask Jimmy later. Every night she would research answers to questions and keep up to date with issues of particular importance in different areas of the country she was in.⁷⁸

One influential thing that boosted Carter's morale and campaigning strategy was the development of the Peanut Brigade. The Peanut Brigade was initially made up of fellow Georgians who traveled all over the country, met new people, and told them about Jimmy Carter. They completed everything from passing out brochures in shopping malls, making speeches to groups, and appearing on local radio and television programs. They paid their way; they did the complex jobs necessary to campaign, such as making telephone calls for hours on end. They were pivotal in helping get Jimmy elected.⁷⁹

Rosalynn recounted an incident that harmed Jimmy in the polls. It was an interview with *Playboy* magazine where Jimmy confessed to "lusting in my heart" for other women. The interview was all over the place, casting dark shadows over all the campaign issues. It was the first question that everyone asked Rosalynn, to which her response was, "Jimmy talks too much, but at least people know he's honest and doesn't mind answering questions."⁸⁰ Rosalynn was not worried about the issue of lust; she was never angry with Jimmy during the interview. She was

⁷⁸ Carter, *First Lady From Plains*, 125-126.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 130-131.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 148.

angry with the *Playboy* writer, who ended the interview and turned the tape recorder off as Jimmy was trying to explain his religion. The interview hurt the campaign until the end. In Shreveport, Louisiana, even one television reporter asked Rosalynn on camera whether she had committed adultery, to which she answered, "If I had, I wouldn't tell you!"⁸¹

November 2, 1976, was Election Day. The Carter family was together to watch the returns from all around the country. They waited in a large suite at the Omni Hotel in Atlanta with two television sets going, telephones ringing, and friends and aides wandering in and out. Their hopes and dreams for the chief executive were on the line. It was after three o'clock in the morning when the telephone rang from the governor of Mississippi, and Jimmy said that they had won. Mississippi had put them over the top. Jimmy gathered his family together to talk to them. "We've done it. It was a long, hard fight and I couldn't have done it without you. I'm proud of all of you. We have a big task ahead, but we can do that too. Just wait. We'll make the whole country proud."⁸²

Two camps faced off in the election of 1976, that of the incumbent Republican Gerald Ford and Democratic hopeful Jimmy Carter. Out of the gate, Ford needed to conquer the 40-point lead that Jimmy Carter had established. His strategy was to adapt the values-based politics that Carter had shaped into his message and convince the American public that he was more trustworthy than Carter. Political analysts believed Ford's only way to victory was to hold the Midwest. The *New York Times* noted, "Excluding Ohio, then, the Middle West shapes up as follows: Safe for or leaning to Mr. Carter, 47 electoral votes; safe for or leaning to Mr. Ford, 53; even, 8. Ohio could tip the balance either way if there are no major changes in the final stage of

⁸¹ Carter, *First Lady From Plains* 148.

⁸² *Ibid*, 149-150.

the campaign.⁸³ Ford needed to hold the industrial heartland, which was traditionally a battleground area of contention. Ford's advisors thought to complete this action, he needed to rekindle the zeal of President Nixon's appeal to Catholics, especially since they had become more politically conservative in the past years. To do this, Ford needed to maintain his honesty, his commitment to family, and his conservative stance on social issues such as abortion, busing, marijuana decriminalization, and amnesty for Vietnam War draft evaders. He pushed for an America where families could prosper in the new generation. The Ford team also pushed for a way to capture the Protestant vote. They knew the southern Protestant vote would go to Carter, but they were trying to capture the northern vote. The strategy was to show the Protestants that he held the same basic beliefs. Ford was an Episcopalian, but he never portrayed his faith openly, yet he knew that Carter would get a lot of the Southern "born-again" vote due to his testimony. Ford was willing to do whatever it took to limit Carter's religious image from making an impact on voters. Therefore, since it was a bicentennial year, Ford started to reference God and country at the many events he attended. Ford also became the first American president to address the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, a position that the Carter camp thought Carter was a shoo-in to receive. Ford sent Jerry Falwell a message to Thomas Road Baptist Church at the bicentennial, where he discussed civil religious themes. Ford knew he had to unite the people in a disjointed American society.⁸⁴

Ford's "America Together" campaign message was positioned to heal the nation. He suggested that his unfavorable pardoning of Nixon was the right decision, as he was helping to

⁸³ R. W. Apple, "Carter and Ford in a Tight Race in Midwest, with Ohio Key State," *The New York Times*, October 22, 1976.

⁸⁴ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 270-274.

heal the nation. He stated that the nation was recovering both economically and socially and that conditions were only improving under his guidance as president. During Ford's administration, the unemployment rate was still above 7 percent.⁸⁵

Ford's campaign team made a bold political move along the campaign trail. They decided to show Ford as a leader. Therefore, they agreed that the president would not campaign at all. This resulted in Ford not being a great communicator during stump speeches. He could gain more votes if he stayed in the White House and projected an air of confidence as president of the United States. Also, when Ford traveled, he was at the center of political spoofs, such as falling down Air Force One. The campaign did not want to risk these images in the media. They felt they could control the narrative with well-rehearsed speeches in front of the camera. "I would prefer to be judged based on my actions and proven leadership rather than on the empty rhetoric of promise. The business of the Nation cannot be neglected."⁸⁶ The hit on the Carter campaign was to portray him as an amateur in business governing and as a man who talks out of both sides of his mouth.

Regarding launching a southern strategy, the Ford camp sent out Bob Dole. He traveled to Salisbury, North Carolina, with his new wife, Elizabeth, who was born and raised in Salisbury. She had her mind set on winning the South for the Ford-Dole ticket. Elizabeth turned out to be just as ambitious as her husband and just as hard of a political attacker. She was a women's rights activist and a staunch supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment. She connected with voters in different regions while traveling on the campaign trail.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 275-276.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 279.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 280-281.

Carter's campaign believed that the South was solidified behind his effort to be president of the United States. He counted them as "safe" states and only made occasional trips to them. Carter was focused on the battleground states of the industrial Midwest and California. The campaign itself was a true family affair. Carter and Mondale's family members would campaign for the ticket. Carter hit two snags in the campaign camps, those involving women and Catholics. Carter polled better among men than women, and some women questioned his commitment to their causes. Carter strongly supported the Equal Rights Amendment. However, on the abortion question, 51.3 percent of women on his committee stated that his stance on abortion was too moderate. Carter also called for improved childcare for working parents and pledged to appoint qualified women to his administration. He had already proven this as his advisory board included feminist Gloria Steinem and pro-life Catholic Sidney Callahan.

On the other hand, Catholics were thought to be the key to winning the industrial Midwest and California. Trying to reach their vote, Carter took a moderate stance on abortion and busing and showed that he might oppose affirmative action. However, Catholics still faltered when solidifying a vote for Carter.⁸⁸

Carter and Ford took advantage of a technique that had only been used once before in 1960: televised presidential debates. President Ford had challenged Carter to a televised debate during his convention acceptance speech. Carter was willing, as his team thought they could easily win over Ford in the debate. Ford's team knew he had some hindrances to his skills but believed that Carter's vulnerability would show through. Before the first debate, Ford and his team practiced endlessly. They did mock debates, practiced responding to clips of Carter's, and

⁸⁸ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 283-286.

worked on his appearance by practicing being videoed. However, Carter went to practice sessions and reviewed briefing books to brush up on his responses.

Regarding set debates, the network agreed not to show the six-foot-tall Ford standing next to the five-foot-nine-and-a-half-inch Carter. They also decided on three debates: domestic and foreign, and one open to questions on any topic. During the first debate, ninety-four million Americans, or more than 70 percent of the voting-age population, tuned in to watch. The first debate was held on a Thursday night at the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. It helped to clarify issues and differences between the two candidates. It also helped to finalize the choice of voters around America. After the debate, polls showed a sharp reduction in the number of undecided voters. However, it was not a very enthusiastic debate as both candidates stuck to their original campaign scripts and party platforms. The journalists on the panel had restricted themselves to only one follow-up question for each candidate's reply, and there was a limited opportunity for the candidates to respond to each other; the debate was just a side-by-side interview. There were rarely follow-up interviews, and neither candidate ever challenged one another.

Carter quickly recalled various specific statistics and policy details; however, he made boldly erroneous statements. For example, he stated that President Ford had made the most vetoes. However, that was wrong. Franklin Roosevelt, to name one, was up there in a list of presidents with a high number of vetoes. Carter also had a verbal tic in using the phrases "ums" and "uhs" a lot and rarely looked at the camera. Ford was slow in his delivery, but he sounded more confident than Carter. A poll at the end of the debate showed that 32 percent of viewers thought Ford had won, 25 thought Carter had won, and 33 percent declared it a draw.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 300-308.

During the second debate, the tides had turned, and Carter was more prepared. Ford was confident and did not need to focus on preparing for the topic. The debate took place on October 6th in San Francisco. Carter had worked on his stamina and eliminated the “umms” and “uhhs” from his vocabulary and looked widely more confident. He was also quicker to challenge Ford in the debate. Ford also distorted Carter’s remarks, and Carter quickly called the president out about this. Ford made some big political blunders in the second debate that cost him. First, he misstated his administration’s position on companies that participated in the Arab boycott of American businesses that engaged in trade with Israel. Secondly, he made a costly mistake with Eastern Europe. “There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford administration.”⁹⁰ However, panic struck the Ford administration as his camp immediately had to start walking these remarks back. ⁹¹ Douglas D. Rose noted in “Citizen Uses of the Ford-Carter Debates” that a series of queries were taken for the Center for Political Studies 1976 American National Election study to provide citizens a view of the debates.

The debates were watched by 83% of the respondents. Only 11% viewed only one debate, 27% of the respondents claimed to have watched all four, and an additional 18% watched three debates. The viewing was more dutiful than fun: only 32% of the sample was “very interested” in the debates, 42% had some interest, and- in addition to the on-watchers- 8% claimed no interest at all. Nor was the viewing productive: only 32% claimed to have learned anything from the debates. ⁹²

During the final weeks of the campaign cycle, scandals started to ensue. *Rolling Stone* reported that on a plane ride back from the Republican National Convention in August, the Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz told a sexually crude, racist joke that was so vulgar that the

⁹⁰ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical*, 310.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 308-310.

⁹² Douglas D. Rose, “Citizens Uses of the Ford-Carter Debates,” *The Journal of Politics* 41, no. 1 (February 1979): 214–21.

nation's print services considered it "not fit to print." Ford reprimanded Butz but was hesitant to fire him because he was extremely popular among midwestern farmers, and Ford considered him a close friend. Another scandal soon hit the Ford camp, as John Dean, the former White House counsel who turned against Nixon in the Watergate scandal, stated that Ford, as House minority leader, blocked early hearings related to Watergate at the request of a White House congressional liaison. If these accusations were true, it would mean that Ford had not only obstructed justice but also perjured himself in a court of law. Carter called Ford to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" to the American people. He did not go on attacks on Ford.⁹³ Because of the media attacks, Ford left his no campaign strategy behind and started to tour the country with his messages of peace and trustworthiness on his presidential train called "Honest Abe."

The election night was too close to predict, as it turned out to be the tightest presidential race in terms of electoral votes since 1916. At 3:00 a.m. on Wednesday after the election, the television networks had not yet called the election. In Ohio, the candidates were separated by two-tenths of a percentage point. In Maine, thirty-one votes separated Carter and Ford. California was too close to call. It was after 4:00 a.m. when Carter walked onto the stage at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta to claim the title of president of the United States. Carter finished the race with 50.1 percent of the popular vote with Ford's 48 percent and he won 297 electoral votes to Ford's 240.⁹⁴

When Jimmy Carter was inaugurated, he wanted to show the American people a resounding confidence. Therefore, as the presidential parade led to the White House, he and his family exited their motorcades and walked the mall length. Carter wanted to show that he was

⁹³ Williams, *The Election of the Evangelical* 316-318.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 333-334.

confident in the American people and that he was just like them. He knew he was taking office when the American people desired a return to the basic morals and principles of their government. His speech reminded Americans to seek God's help and guidance to improve their commitment to justice and mercy. He told the public to lean on the strength of the nation's diversity, resilience, and moral values. He stated that the most important values were human rights, environmental quality, nuclear arms control, and the search for justice and peace. He quoted scripture from Micah 6:8: "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"⁹⁵

Negative commentators criticized Carter's rhetorical style. Liberals, conservatives, and moderates on both sides of the political aisle criticized him, citing his undynamic tone.

Liberal former Senator Eugene McCarthy said, 'He's an oratorical mortician. He inters his words and ideas beneath piles of syntactical mush.' I.F. Stone, the liberal publisher, complained, 'There's no music in him. He just can't lift off. He can fool people for a while, but he really doesn't know how to inspire.' From the other end of the political spectrum, Evans and Novack characterized him as 'allergic to all efforts at eloquence,' And the more moderate Paul Healy noted, 'Carter's natural speaking style is fine for insomniacs.'⁹⁶

Carter defeated all the odds stacked against him in the election of 1976. He beat out an incumbent president, Gerald Ford, who had never been elected to an official presidential term. The election of 1976 was a time in America when people were looking for a social, political, and moral compass. They were looking for a change in how their political structure was run, and in step, the Carter machine, whose anti-Washington establishment and strong moral compass swept the American people into a "Mayberry" like favor. America was ready for the change in the balance of power, and Carter was the man. Bringing to Washington, D.C., an equal partner in his

⁹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 21.

⁹⁶ Dan F. Hahn, "The Rhetoric of Jimmy Carter, 1976-1980," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 14, 2 (1984): 265.

wife Rosalynn, she created just as much change as Carter in pioneering women's activism and top governmental positions for generations to come.

Chapter 5

A Formidable First Lady

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were a formidable, powerful team. Their bond, which grew through mutual understanding and trust, was founded on the knowledge that each other would always do what was best for the other. They trusted what the other was doing, each playing off their strengths. As forces in the professional world, the Carters could captivate an audience with their charm and intelligence. By understanding what the American people needed and being able to relate with them, the Carters touched the American people's hearts while still being able to change the game politically. With the American social and political landscape changing, Rosalynn Carter took her presence as First Lady in the White House as a progressive lady of the office. Rosalynn not only adhered to the traditional roles of the First Lady; she used her passions and status in the office to advance the position for future generations. Taking on the historical narrative of women's roles in America, she challenged the gender narrative and plowed a path for future first ladies. Through the equitable partnership with her husband, Rosalynn accomplished many passion projects. She greatly influenced the nation's legislative agenda and created action with her voice. She advocated for those less fortunate by establishing a voice for the voiceless. Rosalynn advocated for women's rights through her work for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment or ERA. She advocated for women to pursue more male-dominated jobs and influenced her husband to nominate women to positions of power. She advocated for the mentally ill and those who provided care for them. Through her passion projects and transformative role, she created a new system of how the American public would view the office of the First Lady. Rosalynn Carter broke barriers for women in what was considered male gender roles.

The traditional gender narrative had been established in America long before America was established as an independent country. Early on, America's forefathers established how women were to be treated by subjecting women to their mother countries, Great Britain, limited roles for females. These roles followed throughout the colonial times of American society and for subsequent generations. The only people allowed to participate in the governmental process were white males who owned property and were over the age of twenty-one. Therefore, the government of the people, by the people, was severely limited. This was because those participating in the government were held by the wealthy gentry of the land. Eventually, more people were added to the electorate through laws, decrees, or amendments in the Constitution over the years. However, one population was omitted until the 1920s, women. Women were limited from the tapestry of the American social, political, and legal systems. Women were seen as property belonging to their fathers or their husbands. They had no legal standing in the eyes of the courts, even when it came to their children. It was unlawful for women to own property or be entitled to inheritance of their rights. Women were considered second-class citizens and were expected to be submissive to male domination. The movement to push women to the ballot box was also a push to secure women a place in an equal society. The right to vote allowed women to participate in a democratic republic.

In 1846, six American women in New York state sent a petition to the state Constitutional Convention demanding suffrage for the state's females. Elizabeth Cady Stanton demanded voting rights in a Woman's Rights Convention resolution two years later. This assembly was attended by three hundred men and women at Seneca Falls, New York, on July 19-20, 1848. Throughout that meeting, not only was the vote at the top of the agenda, but it also focused on other deprivations of women, such as the right to own property, the right to divorce,

the right to have custody of children, to enter occupations, to control money, to receive an education, to be church leaders, and even to be a legal entity apart from one's husband. This was nothing new because, on March 31, 1776, Abigail Adams implored her husband to "remember the ladies" when he was attending the Second Continental Congress. She wrote to her husband to "not putting so much power into the hands of the husbands."¹ Adams thought the Congress, which had convened in May 1775, might have rewritten the laws brought over from Great Britain that constricted women's rights; however, as a new nation was created, it did not. Once the Declaration of Independence was written, it urged states to draft constitutions, leaving matters up to the states. However, when the states drafted their constitutions, only New Jersey gave women and all citizens a certain amount of property and the right to vote in 1776. New Jersey then revoked that right from women and black men in 1807. The U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1788, did not address the voting issue, leaving the states free to set laws and regulations. Women remained silent on public issues until the abolition movement motivated many to speak publicly.

Maria W. Stewart of Boston, a free black woman in the 1830s, followed by Angelina and Sarah Grimke, white sisters born of slaveholders who moved to Philadelphia and became Quakers, started speaking out first. Lucretia Mott and other women, black and white, formed their organizations. Beginning in the 1830s, Mott became one of the most-revered leaders by the Seneca Falls Convention. However, it was not until the Civil War that voting became a more significant issue. Women worked hard during the war as nurses, laborers, and spies. Many had been affected by the war in all aspects, as they had lost their fathers, husbands, and sons to the war. The women's rights advocates had suspended all formal conventions during the war, but

¹ Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5 1776, in Adams Family Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa>.

that did not hinder them from attending abolitionist lecture tours early in the war. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were two critical leaders from these lecture tours. As the war progressed, they set up the Women's Loyal National League to lobby for the Thirteenth Amendment and formally push for emancipation in the United States. ²

After the Civil War, radical Republicans pushed through the Civil War amendments: the Thirteenth, abolishing slavery; the Fourteenth, granting citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States."; and the Fifteenth, forbidding denial of voting rights for citizens "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." After the Constitutional amendments were added granting a class of men the right to vote, women's leaders believed it was time for the Constitution to grant women the right to vote. Wendell Phillips, president of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May 1865, was a long-term advocate for women's rights.

Phillips addressed a convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1851, noting:

That we hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; and we charged that man with gross dishonesty or ignorance who shall contend that men, in the memorable document from which we quote, does not state for the human race; that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the inalienable rights of half only of the human species. ³

However, he was adamant that it would be hard enough to win the vote for the freedmen without trying to secure the vote for women simultaneously. He stated, "One war at one time. One cause at a time." ⁴ Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were shocked that their allies did not

² Doris Stevens and Angela P. Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom: A First-Person Account of the Militant Fight for Women's Rights* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2020), XII-XIV.

³ Wendell Phillips, "Shall Women Have the Right to Vote?" (speech, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1851), Worcester Womens History Project, <https://www.wwhp.org/Resources/WomansRights/shallwomen.html>.

⁴ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, xv.

support them. Anthony, Stanton, and Lucy Stone petitioned Congress for an amendment that would prohibit states from interfering with the elective franchise on account of sex. They started to push for “universal suffrage” for women and black men and referred to themselves for the first time as “suffragists.” On May 10, 1866, the eleventh National Women’s Rights Convention met in New York City. Anthony read a declaration asserting that being denied the right to vote was on the basis as cruel as slavery itself. Out of the New York City assembly, the American Equal Rights Association, which strived to work for universal suffrage, was short-lived.⁵

Stanton and Anthony formed the National Women’s Suffrage Association to work for women’s enfranchisement through a federal amendment and against the Fifteenth Amendment. Stone and Julia Ward Howe launched the American Women Suffrage Association. Henry Ward Beecher, a Brooklyn, New York minister, became its first president. It worked for woman suffrage through state referenda and for ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which was achieved on February 3, 1870. The state-by-state approach was challenging for women suffragists as they were traveling under, at best, harsh conditions to persuade male voters to allow women to vote while powerful political machines were resisting them at every turn. In 1872, Susan B. Anthony sought, through the Fourteenth Amendment, that women could vote. She led a delegation to the polls in Rochester, New York, and was subsequently jailed. Anthony went on to draft an amendment hoping to make it the Sixteenth, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”⁶ Senator Aaron Augustus Sargent, Republican of California and the husband of a leading suffragist named Ellen Clark Sargent, introduced it on January 10, 1878. Eight years

⁵ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XV-XVI.

⁶ US Constitution, amend.19.

after its introduction, it made it to the Senate floor for debate in December 1886, but it was defeated in January 1887. It was introduced in every session of Congress until 1896 when it just dropped off the legislative agenda.⁷

The two suffrage factions merged on February 18, 1890, and the National American Woman Suffrage Association was created. Stanton was the first president, but Anthony was the driving force. They began a campaign in the South. Women in the southern United States had not shown much interest in a constitutional amendment for women's rights, but their voice was needed when it came time to lobby for an amendment. Segregation ran rampant in the South, and that was an issue that needed to be addressed when it came down to whether black women would retain the right to vote. To bring Southerners into the fold, Anthony shunned black women's efforts to join the suffrage activities. She asked Frederick Douglas not to attend a convention in Atlanta. Douglas had been a friend of Anthony and her family since she was a young woman, and he had remained active in the suffrage movement despite his confrontation with Stanton after the Civil War. He continued to do so until the day he died in 1895 after attending a women's conference. The women who had stayed fast all these years were dying out: Lucretia Mott in 1880 and Lucy Stone in 1893. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1902, and Susan B. Anthony in 1906. However, there was new leadership in Dr. Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt.⁸

Across the ocean, in England, women struggled to maintain suffrage just like in America. Voting was a universal concern, not just localized to the North American continent. Emmeline Pankhurst, her daughters Christabel, Sylvia, and Adela, and a small group of women based in Manchester founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. They called themselves

⁷ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XVII.

⁸ *Ibid*, XVII-XVIII.

suffragettes and aimed to wake up the nation through “deeds not words.” They used art, debate, propaganda, and attacks on property, such as window smashing and arson, to fight for suffrage. In 1906, they moved their base to London, where they could hackle the government seat and maintained a constant presence at Whitehall and Downing Street. As the campaign for suffrage became militant, over a thousand suffragettes received prison sentences and were sent to Holloway Prison in North London. They refused to be treated like a political prisoner by going on a hunger strike, to which the government introduced a policy of force-feeding. The government responded with the Cat and Mouse Act in 1913, allowing the hunger-strikers to be released when they were weakened by re-arrested and returned to prison once their health had returned.⁹ The outbreak of World War One brought an immediate suspension of militant action and protest as suffragettes supported the war effort. However, in 1918, the British parliament granted a limited number of women over the age of 30 the right to vote.¹⁰ It was not until 1928 that all women in England received the right to vote.

In 1902, after living in Britain for years, Harriet Stanton Blatch came home to America to find the women’s suffrage movement frail and uninspiring compared to the women’s movement in Britain, whose tactics included arson, rock throwing, and breaking windows. She, therefore, organized the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women in New York in 1907. The goal was to reach out to the growing number of working women and to introduce the idea of having attention-getting parades and outdoor rallies. Blatch spearheaded annual parades in New York

⁹ “1913 Cat and Mouse Act,” April 15, 1913, *UK Parliament*, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/case-study-the-right-to-vote/the-right-to-vote/winon-green-forcefeeding/cat-and-mouse-act/>, Accessed June 13, 2024.

¹⁰ Museum of London, “Who Were the Suffragettes?,” Museum of London, May 11, 2023, <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london/explore/who-were-suffragettes>.

City from 1910-1913. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns were also inspired by the British movement. They had picketed, disrupted meetings, gone to jail, joined hunger strikes, and endured forced feedings. When they returned to America, they joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association, aka NAWSA, and they persuaded Dr. Shaw to allow them to organize a grand parade in Washington, D.C. The Woman Suffrage Procession was set to the day before the president-elect Woodrow Wilson, an opponent to woman suffrage, was to be inaugurated in 1913.

The parade was surrounded by controversy from the start. Organizers were warned that Southerners would not march with black suffragists. Therefore, Paul agreed to exclude African Americans. Then, NAWSA's top leaders ordered that African Americans be permitted to march if they wanted. Adella Hunt Logan, educator at Tuskegee Institute, and other black women were encouraged to participate. The procession was barely underway when rowdy spectators attacked, trampled, and crushed marchers. Close to two hundred people suffered injuries, many requiring hospitalizations, and the police did little to protect them. However, the U.S. Cavalry eventually came to the rescue. The *New York Evening Journal* wrote in 1913, describing the event of women marching in the parade with Inez Mulholland Boissevain in a white cape riding a white horse leading the suffragists down Pennsylvania Avenue. The article noted the women were "jeered, tripped, grabbed, shoved, and many heard 'indecent epithets' and 'barnyard conversations.' Instead of protecting the parade, the police 'seemed to enjoy all the ribald jokes and laughter, and part participated in them.'"¹¹ However, with the parade's attention, Paul began to escalate her efforts to pass an amendment for women's rights. She led a delegation to the

¹¹ Sheridan Harvey, "Marching for the Vote Remembering the Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913," *Marching for the Vote (March 1998) - Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9803/suffrage.html>.

White House, petitioning Congress and sending out cross-country caravans. Paul and Burns parted ways with the NAWSA over tactics, goals, and finances. They created the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage and later the National Woman's Party.¹²

The purpose of the National Woman's Party was to get President Wilson to support suffrage and to press Congress to adopt an amendment. President Wilson stated that he could not act unless his party, the Democratic Party, made suffrage part of its platform and that it was best left to the states through referenda. However, Paul was insistent as she sent delegations to meet with the President to convince him otherwise. On January 10, 1917, the NWP dispatched what became known as "Silent Sentinels" to picket at the White House gates. These women picketed/ protested the women's rights issue daily through all elements. They carried banners with slogans such as "Mr. President! How long must women wait for liberty?"¹³ Newspapers and legislators ridiculed the women picketing in front of the White House, but Wilson's administration and the public, in the beginning, tolerated the women. The *New York Times* denoted in 1917 that the Silent Sentinels picketed the White House at all exits that the President must pass after President Wilson adopted a new plan for women's suffrage.¹⁴ It was stated that Wilson tipped his hat to the women as he passed by or invited them to tea on cold days, which they declined. When Wilson planned to enter World War I, and after Congress passed the war resolution in April 1917, the sentinels carried signs suggesting that a country that did not allow its women to vote could not police democracy worldwide. People started to consider their protest unpatriotic in a time of war. Mobs started to attack the women, and the police chief warned Paul that picketers

¹² Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XVIII-XIX.

¹³ *Ibid*, XX.

¹⁴ "Suffragists Will Picket White House: Plan To Post "Silent Sentinels" Bearing Emblems, Whom President Must Pass. Will Guard ALL Exits New Campaign Of Militancy Arranged When President Says His Views Are Unchanged. Raise Fund For Sentinels. Found By Party Commands." *New York Times*, Jan 10, 1917.

would be arrested if they continued. However, the picketers continued. On June 22, 1917, two Sentinels were arrested for “obstructing traffic.” They were, however, dismissed without sentence, but as more picketing continued and police arrested more women, jail terms were imposed longer and longer sentences. More than two hundred arrests were made, and nearly one hundred women went to the D.C. Jail or the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia. Both locations were extremely brutal to the women as they experienced beatings, contaminated food, and terrible sanitation. Hunger strikes were common, and the jailers force-fed them by holding them down and stuffed a tube down their nose or throat as they gagged and poured a liquid concoction directly into their stomachs. The conditions of the jails and workhouses were leaked along with the way the women were being treated, and supporters, husbands, and relatives pressured Wilson for their release. However, Wilson claimed he had no jurisdiction over the local arrest. It wasn’t until November 1917 when Wilson suddenly pardoned all the jailed women, and later, the D.C. Court of Appeals invalidated all the arrests.¹⁵

President Wilson’s position on suffrage had evolved as Carrie Chapman Catt, who represented the more conservative wing of the suffrage movement, had directly persuaded the President to thaw on the issue of women’s rights. The NAWSA had dedicated itself to assisting in the war effort, and the leaders were anti-Paul’s tactics. However, in December 1917, when Congress reconvened, President Wilson did not mention woman suffrage in his recommendations to the lawmakers. In September of 1917, a Senate committee reported the amendment favorably, and the House formed a committee to consider it. It was only until the day before the House voted on it that Wilson urged its passage quietly. The women’s rights amendment passed the House on January 10, 1918, by 274 to 136, but the Senate did not take it

¹⁵ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XX-XXI.

up for months. During this time, the picketers remained in front of the White House, which resulted in more arrests. Finally, Wilson caved and threw the total weight of the presidency toward the passage of the Woman Suffrage Amendment. He publicly addressed the Senate on September 30, 1918, noting the sacrifices and labor of the women on behalf of World War I, noting nothing of the treatment of the jailed suffragists. However, the amendment failed 62 to 34, two votes shy of the two-thirds majority. The war was over on November 11, 1918, and the lame-duck session of Congress did not act on woman suffrage. The National Woman's Party in January 1919 found new ways of protest by lighting fires in urns, called "Watchfires of Freedom," at the White House and other buildings to burn Wilson's speeches. Woodrow Wilson made a passionate address to the Senate on the Nineteenth Amendment on September 20, 1918: "Are we alone to ask and take the utmost that our women can give- service and sacrifice of every kind- and still say we do not see what title that gives them to stand by our sides in the guidance of the affairs of their nation and ours? We have made partners of the women in this war; shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?"¹⁶ In the following days, the House passed the amendment by 304 to 89. The Senate passed it 56 to 25 on June 4, 1919. The Nineteenth Amendment now required approval from the legislators of thirty-six states. Approval was a hard-fought battle. Tennessee came down to the wire where NAWSA and the NWP worked hard to win a 49 to 47 win. On August 26, 1920, the secretary of state Bainbridge Colby certified the results and proclaimed to make the Nineteenth Amendment part of the Constitution.¹⁷

¹⁶ "Address to the Senate on the Nineteenth Amendment," *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-senate-the-nineteenth-amendment>.

¹⁷ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XXI-XXII.

Suffrage was a universal quality that is still being studied as women fought for equality globally at the voter box. When examining the history of women's suffrage, at least 19 other countries allowed women to vote in national elections before the U.S. passed the 19th Amendment in 1920. New Zealand, for example, enfranchised women in 1893, making it the first nation to formally allow women to vote in national elections. Also, more than half of the countries analyzed by the Pew Research Center out of 198, 129 countries granted women the right to vote between 1893 and 1960. The research included all but six European nations. Major cultural or governmental shifts led to other world regions securing the right to vote for women. For example, 80% of African citizens were granted universal suffrage between 1950 and 1975 due to European decolonization as the new nations created new governments and constitutions. It is interesting to denote that at least 19 nations, including the U.S., initially restricted the right to vote for women of backgrounds based on demographic factors based on race, age, education, or marital status. In Australia, Indigenous women were not enfranchised until 1962, six decades after non-Indigenous women were able to vote. When India first gave women the right to vote in 1935, only those who were married to a male voter or possessed specific literacy qualifications could vote. Not all women in India got the right to vote until 1950. As countries have been extending branches in support of more women to vote, there are a few countries, however, that have rescinded women's voting rights. For example, Afghanistan adopted women's suffrage after winning independence from Britain in 1919. Due to governmental shifts and instability over the years, women have lost the right to participate in elections several times. Today, they can vote in Afghanistan, but some barriers limit their participation.¹⁸

¹⁸ Katherine Schaeffer, "Key Facts about Women's Suffrage around the World, a Century after U.S. Ratified 19th Amendment," Pew Research Center, October 5, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/10/05/key-facts-about-womens-suffrage-around-the-world-a-century-after-u-s-ratified-19th-amendment/>.

Obtaining the right to vote did not bring all the other freedoms that women sought. It did not even get full suffrage to all American women. In the South, where there was opposition to extending the right to vote to black women, political leaders found ways to disenfranchise most of them. Political leaders controlled black men and women through fear and intimidation, poll taxes, and “tests” until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Opponents of women voting in elections feared that women would vote as a bloc to clean up politics, improve schools, and seek better working conditions. However, women voted just like their husbands did until recent years when a “gender gap” emerged. Women have been voting increasingly Democratic and in more significant numbers than men. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, a more substantial proportion of women than men have voted in every presidential election since 1980.¹⁹ In 1923, Alice Paul drafted the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), but it did not get a vote in Congress for five decades. It says, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.”²⁰ Paul was still alive in 1972 when the ERA passed both houses of Congress and went to the state’s legislatures for ratification. Thirty-five states voted to ratify the ERA three short of the thirty-eight or three-fourths of the states needed before the 1982 deadline.

Women still endure inequalities in the workplace and society. On average, women still earn less than men despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, and other legislation prohibiting employment discrimination. Women are still fighting for equality in society today as they have since the beginning of the conception of American democracy. A blip of freedom was shown during World War II as women could enter

¹⁹ “Gender Differences in Voter Turnout,” *Center for American Women and Politics*, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/voters/gender-differences-voter-turnout>.

²⁰ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XXII-XXIII.

the workforce as men were sent to war; however, when the men returned home, women returned to the home. As Doris Stevens once wrote, “That women have been aroused never again to be content with their subjection there can be no doubt, One thing is certain. They will not go back.”²¹

Rosalynn Carter was born in 1927, having been the product of deep South segregationist culture. Mrs. Carter would have experienced the traditional gender roles learned from her isolated town of Plains, Georgia. Through her education at Plains High School, she learned about the war of the time and its effects on American society, but the effects did not nearly reach the small town of Plains. Through her studies and life events, Rosalynn was destined to break the mold of traditional women’s boundaries as she modeled her life through her faith and determination to help others.

Article II of the United States Constitution lists the powers of the Presidency. The article establishes the presidency and details the powers of the office and the duties the office is entitled to, both domestically and foreign.²² However, the Constitution does not list the First Lady's office. The powers of the office are implied and, therefore, change with each incoming lady to the office. Each First Lady establishes her protocols for the office based on her passion projects and the precedent the previous First Lady set before her. Critics then judge the First Lady for doing far too much or too little for the country based on their role as First Lady, and it alters how the next lady will handle the position herself. The First Lady is not an elected position. However, due to being in the White House as a resident and working so close to the office of the President, the First Lady serves an inherent role of public service. When the role of the First Lady was

²¹ Stevens and Dodson, *Jailed for Freedom*, XXIV.

²² US Constitution, art.2.

established, they served as the hostess and was in charge of all things domestic. However, that role has evolved. If a President were a widower or a bachelor, they would call upon surrogates to fill the role of First Lady. A role that was deemed as a social necessity for many of the ceremonial functions of the President. Thomas Jefferson was a widower when he was elected President of the United States in 1800. Therefore, his Secretary of State James Madison's wife, Dolley Madison, took on the role of First Lady when Jefferson's daughter was unavailable. This was a seamless transition for Dolley into the role of First Lady when her husband, James Madison, became President of the United States, as she had already been performing the duties. Dolley Madison was renowned for her amazing dinners and the ability to bring opposing political players together at her social events. Mrs. Madison was often pointed to as a model spouse capable of handling the domestic and ceremonial roles that came along with the presidency of the United States while not overstepping the social and political barriers of the period. At the time of her passing in 1848, President Zachary Taylor eulogized her as the "first lady of our land." There was a problem with the term "lady" being used in the capacity of the office of First Lady. When it came to the term "First Lady," several First Ladies did not like to be referred to as "lady" so and so.

For example, "Lady Washington." The women did not like being called "lady" even into the 20th and 21st centuries. Jackie Kennedy noted that it sounded like the name of a prized racehorse. Other terms were used, such as "Presidentress" or "Mrs. President." However, those terms never lasted and did not fit in all capacities, especially when other relatives filled in for spouseless Presidents. *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* used the term "First Lady of the White House" to describe the term that was being used to describe Harriet Lane's position of filling in

for her uncle James Buchanan since he never married. This was the first time the term First Lady was seen in print, and it has stuck ever since.²³

First Ladies, throughout history, are some of the most famous women in America and have been able to influence or at least have the perception of being able to influence the President of the United States. Some influential First Ladies have been Harriet Lane, who took on the interests of Native Americans; Mary Todd Lincoln, who advocated for education, employment, and housing opportunities for freed slaves; and Helen Taft, who inspected unsafe working conditions and used her influence to get health and safety laws passed. The role of the First Lady as an advocate and ceremonial figure grew as the years progressed. The First Ladies needed to add the aid of secretaries to help promote their causes on both the domestic and international front: Edith Roosevelt was the first to have a federally-hired social secretary, Lou Hoover hired additional secretaries with her funds, Eleanor Roosevelt was the first to have a personal secretary and social and administrative secretaries, Jackie Kennedy hired the first press secretary, and Rosalyn Carter hired a Chief of Staff. Some of the different causes championed over the years by First Ladies have been environmentalism, volunteerism, women's rights, literacy, and treatment for drug dependency. These advocations for social issues are often interwoven with ceremonial functions at the White House, such as themed Christmas decorations or Easter Egg Rolls. American society has been fascinated with the First Ladies as trendsetters in style, fashion, entertainment, and home design. The social scene of the First Ladies is always attractive to the American public as the next big item of what to follow. When Frances Folsom Cleveland married President Cleveland in 1886, women across America started to imitate her hairstyle, and advertisers used her image to sell products. Jackie Kennedy, one of the most iconic

²³ "First Lady's Role," *George W. Bush Presidential Library*, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/first-ladys-role>.

fashion First Ladies, worked to preserve the White House historically, and her special tours were televised. Not to mention, her style is still imitated to this day. Inaugural gowns, which have been preserved in the Smithsonian, have set the tone for the social season in Washington going back to the 19th century. Every move the First Lady made was under the public spotlight. They watched to commemorate their style, see how they affected political agendas, and set social trends for the American people.²⁴

Edith Wilson was the first First Lady who compounded the office, and she was the closest any woman had ever come to serving in a presidential capacity due to an opportunity born out of a national crisis. Edith Wilson was a descendant of Virginia slave owners born in Wytheville on October 15, 1872. She went to Martha Washington College to study music. Her first marriage was to a businessman named Norman Galt in 1896; however, in 1908, her husband died unexpectedly. She met Mr. Wilson, the bereaved president who was still mourning the loss of his first wife, Ellen. They were married privately on December 18, 1915, at her home. Edith worked well within the boundaries of the First Lady as she functioned as a hostess, but the war in Europe soon overshadowed the social aspect. Edith Wilson found practical and symbolic ways to support Woodrow Wilson during his time as president. She hosted “Meatless Mondays,” “Wheatless Wednesdays,” and “Gasless Sundays.” She volunteered for the American Red Cross and brought together wives of cabinet members, family, and friends to publicly support the purchase of War Savings Bonds. Mrs. Wilson adopted soldiers overseas, sowed clothing, made bandages, and prepared items for fighting soldiers. The Wilsons were famous for introducing Shropshire sheep to the White House lawn, which allowed the grounds crew to be accessible for wartime service. The sheep were then sheared, and the wool was divided into fifty lots for each

²⁴ “First Lady’s Role,” *George W. Bush Presidential Library*, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/first-ladys-role>.

of the forty-eight states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. She was the first honorary First Lady to preside over the Girl Scouts of America, using the position to support the Scout's wartime service efforts, and she was the first woman to sign a registration card for the U.S. Food Administration.²⁵ Edith accompanied Wilson to Europe when the Allies conferred on terms of peace. Wilson then returned to campaign for Senate approval of the peace treaty and the League of Nations Covenant. His health failed in October 1919. He suffered from a stroke, which left him partially paralyzed.²⁶ Edith Wilson took over many of the daily routines and details of the presidency. The White House did not announce President Wilson's illness, leaving room for much speculation and rumors. Edith did not initiate programs or make any significant decisions for the government, nor did she try to control the executive branch. However, she did select matters for her husband's attention and let everything else go to the heads of departments. Democrats and Republicans confronted Vice President Thomas Marshall, urging him to assume Wilson's duties as they felt that his death was imminent. Edith asked Wilson's doctor, Francis Decrum, whether the president should step down, but he insisted that it "would have a bad effect on the country and a serious effect on our patient."²⁷ Edith wrote that Decrum stated, "Have everything come to you; weigh the importance of each matter, and see if it is possible by consultations with the respective heads of the Departments to solve them without the guidance of your husband."²⁸ Edith studied every paper that was sent and tried to digest everything. She did

²⁵ Contributor: Shiloh Holley, "Edith Bolling Galt Wilson (1872–1961)," Encyclopedia Virginia, May 3, 2024, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/wilson-edith-bolling-galt-1872-1961/>.

²⁶ "Edith Wilson," *WHHA (En-US)*, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/bios/edith-wilson>.

²⁷ Amy Russo and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, *Women of the White House: The Illustrated Story of the First Ladies of the United States of America* (London: Welbeck, 2021), 110.

²⁸ Russo and Eksterowicz, *Women of the White House*, 110.

not make decisions on public affairs and filtered what issues her husband received. *The New York Times* noted in 1923 that “Mrs. Wilson began what she called her ‘stewardship’ of the Presidency. She controlled the flow of policy papers and letters to the White House sickroom. She consulted with Cabinet members and channeled messages between them and the President and between the President and Congress.”²⁹ The extent of Edith Wilson’s involvement in the administration of Woodrow Wilson’s presidency is still up for historical debate. There is debate as to whether President Wilson’s 1919 veto of the Volstead Act, establishing the prohibition of alcohol, was his work, his wife’s, or his chief of staff, Joe Tumulty. However, Congress overrode the veto. The most consequential issue in question has to deal with the failure of the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and its provisions for the League of Nations. Historians have wondered if Edith Wilson’s control over information and visitors to her husband affected the treaty's demise. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee suspected Woodrow Wilson had suffered a stroke and issued an inquiry. Senator Albert B. Fall, a Republican from New Mexico, had labeled Mrs. Wilson “the Presidentess who had fulfilled the dream of the suffragettes by changing her title from First Lady to Acting First Man.” Mr. Fall visited the president in person in December of 1919 as Edith Wilson had cleverly covered the president’s infirmed arm with a sheet, and his bed was in the shadows. The meeting went so well that it eased the political pressures on the senator’s mind.³⁰ Edith’s actions as the First Lady have been a study on handling a presidential crisis that placed her near the nation’s highest office.

²⁹ Diane Camper. "The First Woman President: No Power Lust, just Devotion from the First Lady." *New York Times*, Mar 10, 1987.

³⁰ Contributor: Shiloh Holley, “Edith Bolling Galt Wilson (1872–1961),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, May 3, 2024, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/wilson-edith-bolling-galt-1872-1961/>.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt expanded the role of First Lady, not by being the first First Lady who served through four consecutive bids to the White House, but by pursuing an agenda that ranged from domestic social issues to global concerns. Eleanor was an independent woman who was outspoken, occasionally controversial, and sometimes at odds with her husband, the President. She broke traditional female stereotypes of the age by not accepting a subordinate role. When FDR began his extension into politics, Eleanor was right by his side, helping make connections and forge alliances. For example, when Roosevelt was appointed assistant secretary of the Navy under President Wilson, Eleanor followed him to Washington. She made social calls and hosted and attended various functions, cultivating contacts to advance Roosevelt's career. Eleanor was noted to be a vital partner in the cause on the home front when the U.S. entered World War I. She became a Red Cross volunteer by helping supervise knitting operations and even opened a canteen for soldiers traveling through Washington's Union Station. Eleanor even pushed Interior Secretary Franklin Lane to prompt Congress to increase St. Elizabeth's Hospital, a federal mental health facility, budget after she was appalled by the treatment of veterans and the conditions in which they lived. Eleanor accompanied her husband in 1920 on his unsuccessful campaign for vice president. Roosevelt's campaign advisor, Louis Howe, taught Eleanor about politics and the press throughout his whistle-stop campaign. The Roosevelt's lives were changed drastically in 1921 when FDR contracted polio while on vacation in New Brunswick, Canada. While Roosevelt traveled for various treatments, Eleanor was working on establishing a political persona.³¹ Eleanor Roosevelt supported and encouraged FDR, but she also never faltered from her political passions. She founded the Todhunter School for Girls and established a factory at Val-Kill cottage in Hyde Park, providing jobs for the unemployed. Mrs.

³¹ Russo and Eksterowicz, *Women of the White House*, 124-126.

Roosevelt also strongly supported women's rights and full participation in the political process. She started working for the Democratic Party, and in 1922, she was the vice president and finance chairman of the Democratic Women's Committee. In 1924, Eleanor Roosevelt joined the Women's City Club, which focused on child labor laws and worker's compensation.³²

Roosevelt ascended into the political arena after his battle with polio by winning the New York state governorship in 1928. Eleanor wrote in an article for *Red Book Magazine* that when it came to politics, "women must learn to play the game as men do. Certain women profess to be horrified at the thought of women bosses bartering and bickering in the hard game of politics with men. But many more women realize that we are living in a material world and that politics cannot be played from the clouds."³³ When FDR was elected President of the United States, she revealed that she was troubled on the night of his election in 1932; she knew her personal life had ended. Once in office, First Lady Eleanor quickly held press conferences, hosting 35 female journalists. She encouraged Franklin D. Roosevelt to offer women positions in the White House and was the first to invite women journalists to the White House. She wanted to ensure they knew she would provide them access to the White House so they could "tell the women of throughout the country what you think they should know."³⁴ In her 12 years in the White House, Eleanor held 348 press briefings, most of which did not allow men entry. Eleanor engaged with the press through briefings, wrote books, delivered radio broadcasts, and penned a nationally thought-after newspaper column called "My Day" from 1935 to 1962. It started as a six-day-per-

³² "Eleanor Roosevelt," About Eleanor, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://roosevelt.ucsd.edu/about/about-eleanor.html#Early-Years>.

³³ "Women Must Learn to Play the Game as Men Do: Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project: The George Washington University," *Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project*, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/women-must-learn-play-game-men-do>.

³⁴ Russo and Eksterowicz, *Women of the White House*, 127.

week description of her activities as First Lady; however, it transformed into a platform where she could speak about politics.³⁵ By 1957, certain newspapers had dropped the column because they felt it had become too partisan. Eleanor pushed activism to new heights while she was in the office of First Lady. She became known for allying herself with the NAACP and lobbying for the Costigan-Wagner Bill that aimed to make lynching a federal crime³⁶. She resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution, an association to which all First Ladies were given lifetime membership after they refused to allow black opera singer Marian Anderson to perform in its Constitution Hall in 1939. The National Youth Administration, one of FDR's New Deal plans, was formed with the backing of Eleanor Roosevelt's liking. It focused on work projects, vocational training, apprenticeship training, educational and nutritional camps for women, and student aid. Eleanor Roosevelt also encouraged governmental support for art by establishing the Federal Writers Project, Federal Theater Project, and Federal Art Project.³⁷ When Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term, Eleanor had become such a recognized figure that she was targeted with campaign pins that read, "And we don't want Eleanor either."³⁸ After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, she addressed the nation in a radio broadcast with a message of courage and resilience before her husband had even spoken publicly on the matter. She served as Assistant Director of Civilian Defense during the war from 1941 to 1942. She visited England

³⁵ "My Day: Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project: The George Washington University," *Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project*, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/my-day>.

³⁶ "Costigan-Wagner Bill," *NAACP*, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/legislative-milestones/costigan-wagner-bill>.

³⁷ "Eleanor Roosevelt," *About Eleanor*, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://roosevelt.ucsd.edu/about/about-eleanor.html#Early-Years>.

³⁸ Russo and "Women Must Learn to Play the Game as Men Do: Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project: The George Washington University." *Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project*. Accessed February 18, 2024. <https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/women-must-learn-play-game-men-do>.

and the South Pacific to foster goodwill among the Allies and boost the morale of the U.S. servicemen overseas. Even after her husband's death, she continued with her activism. President Harry Truman appointed her chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which made her instrumental in drafting the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even in 1962, President John F. Kennedy appointed her to chair his Commission on the Status of Women, which examined workplace and educational inequality. She was nicknamed "First Lady of the World" by President Truman as an advocate for social causes and a voice for the voiceless. She died in 1962 and is interred beside her husband in the Rose Garden at Springwood, the Roosevelts' Hyde Park Home.³⁹

Rosalynn Carter entered the office of the First Lady on January 20, 1977, with ambition like her predecessors before her. Just like Edith Wilson, she had a close working connection with the President; however, Carter was not incapacitated, which manifested in Mrs. Carter being Carter's closest aide. In connection with Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosalynn Carter used her platform as First Lady to champion many causes that would shape the framework of the American political and social society for generations to come. With the culmination of all her past life ambitions and lessons, she was ready to set a path for a new American spirit of democracy and social change. Having come from the tiny town of Plains, Georgia, to now being at the right hand of the President of the United States, Rosalynn was ready to accomplish her passions and roll up her sleeves as she had in the past. She had proved to be a businesswoman with keen management skills as she was used alongside her husband in the peanut warehouse. They formed a political alliance as Jimmy launched his political career by becoming Georgia state senator in 1963, then rising to the ranks of governor in 1971. Rosalynn learned to hit the campaign trails to advocate

³⁹ Russo and Eksterowicz, *Women of the White House*, 129.

for her husband. While her husband was in office as Governor of Georgia, Rosalynn championed many of her passion projects, such as prison reform, women's rights, and mental health. She continued these projects as Jimmy rose the political ladder to the White House. Once in the White House, Rosalynn did not back down as First Lady. She lobbied for the successful passage of the Mental Health Systems Act and even testified before the Senate on its behalf. She completed other passion projects on domestic and foreign issues. She attended cabinet meetings as an observer and had weekly working lunches with her husband to talk about policies and details of the administration. She was also ambassador to Latin America and the Caribbean, meeting with heads of state to talk about trade and defense. The *Washington Post* ran an article discussing the reasons for Rosalynn Carters's trip to Latin America and how she was perceived by foreign heads.

Last week a Latin American diplomat here (not from Brazil) told a reporter it was "absurd" to think that a woman, particularly one with no expertise, could hold substantive discussions on hemispheric problems. However, the White House and State Department are brushing aside the machismo complaints. One official noted that the Latin American leaders whom Mrs. Carter will meet "are sophisticated people. They know that women are assuming high roles in the United States, and they know that she is very close to him (the President)."⁴⁰

While she was First Lady, the institution of the office became more formalized. She was the first to establish her workspace in the East Wing. Her office was given further authority with the passage of Public Law 95-750, which linked the first lady's position to that of her husband. The measure provided funds for the upkeep of the executive mansion provided to the First Lady in connection with the president's duties. Jimmy always called Rosalynn "a very equal partner" or "a perfect extension of myself." However, they did receive criticism from the American public as they questioned her power by labeling her "the Assistant President." One reporter noted that the

⁴⁰ Susanna McBee, "Mrs. Carter's Trip Carefully Crafted to Make Policy Points", *Washington Post*.

White House was not like the peanut farm back home in Georgia and did not belong to his family. Rosalynn responded, “In a way, the American voter does elect the family.”⁴¹ Rosalynn created an equal partnership with her husband in the White House that created a voice of change in the office of the First Lady for generations to come.

Rosalynn Carter was just like any other First Lady throughout American history. She carried out the ceremonial and social functions as hostess of the house. Rosalynn hosted teas, dinners, and dances for various social and international functions, whether for political or social gain. She even had a hand in making the Presidential residence of the White House more personable to the needs and likings of the family. Although she was the First Lady and hostess to the nation, she deeply desired to protect her family’s privacy from those who wanted to know more about their time in the White House. There were several instances when Rosalynn was seen as harsh with the media regarding her family. When her son Chip and his wife Caron separated in November of 1978, friends had noted that Jimmy and Rosalynn had tried to get the couple to stay together, but they failed. However, Rosalynn refused to discuss the issue. When a *Washington Post* article in 1979 ran a story claiming that Jeff and Annette had smoked marijuana in Arlington, Virginia, Rosalynn again refused to comment. The article referenced the Secret Service in their installation of protection material. However, it referred where “A source close to the Carter family said yesterday, ‘it is fairly common knowledge’ in the White House that Jeff and Annette Carter go to the Arlington house to ‘listen to rock music and smoke dope.’”⁴² When the media stated that Jimmy’s brother Billy was an alcoholic, Rosalynn commented that “he’s

⁴¹ Russo and Eksterowicz, *Women of the White House*, 155.

⁴² Blaine Harden, “U.S. Agents Wire Va. Home Visited by Jeff Carters,” *The Washington Post*, April 28, 1979.

ill.”⁴³ The *New York Times* in 1979 noted that Billy Carter was not an alcoholic but an alcohol abuser. He entered the Long Beach Naval Hospital, where he required professional assistance to help break a habit.⁴⁴ The media referred to Rosalynn Carter as the “Steel Magnolia” due to her appearance of being feminine and warm yet also having a tough, cold side.⁴⁵

When planning for big events, Rosalynn noted that transitioning from a Georgia state senator’s wife to a Georgia governor’s wife was harder because there were no rules, staff, or procedures for entertaining. However, people and procedures were already in place in the White House. Protocols had to be followed, history had to be learned about international visitors to service their customs and traditions, and everything had to be planned for every minute of the event. For the first visit to the White House, Rosalynn and Jimmy chose Lopez Portillos, the Mexican President at the time. Jimmy wanted to show that his administration would improve relations with Latin America. This proved vital in the nation when Rosalynn was appointed ambassador to Latin America and traveled there to speak on the administration’s behalf. There were episodes during event planning where the Carter administration floundered. It was noted that communication between the East and West wing offices was not always the greatest when planning social and political events. One time, shortly after the inauguration, Rosalynn called the White House operator and asked to be connected to Jimmy, to which the operator replied, “Jimmy, who?”⁴⁶ When Ohio Governor James Rhodes arrived at Carter’s first governor’s dinner in 1977, he had his two grandchildren with him. An aide in the administration told him that he

⁴³ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 115.

⁴⁴ Wayne King Special to The New York Times. "Billy Carter is Not Alcoholic but Abuser, Doctor Says: Acute Bronchitis Diagnosed." *New York Times*, Mar 24, 1979.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 116.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 96.

could not have his grandchildren with him, to which he immediately left. The Carters immediately ordered the staff to find him and tell him that the children could play with Amy, their daughter, but they could not find him. The *Washington Post* wrote on the incident in 1977 and noted, "President Carter himself telephoned his apologies to Rhodes, a Republican." The newspaper also reported that a Rhodes aide stated, "The President was very gracious to call."⁴⁷ Another incident occurred in April of 1978, when the band played the wrong national anthem at the arrival ceremony for the Romanian president Nicolae Ceausescu, unaware that it had been changed recently. Rosalynn stated that she loved to pick out the entertainment for the White House events, as that was her most enjoyable task. In the end, Jimmy did get a say in finalizing the decisions of who was to perform. The Carters aimed to ensure that the White House performers reflected a diverse, inclusive array of American society and creativity. Some performers invited to the White House were John Denver, the Charlie Daniels Band, Beverly Sills, Itzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Shirley Verrett, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and the Guarneri String Quartet. With weather permitting, the Carters loved to host galas outside of the White House due to the rooms being too small to accommodate all of the guests. One of the most exciting outdoor events was the White House Jazz Festival. This had occurred since the Kennedy administration, but the Carters were known for bringing it to new heights. The guest list included Vice President Walter Mondale, members of the Cabinet, and Congress. They all were in attendance as fifty artists from around the country, such as Stan Getz, John Lewis, and Gerry Mulligan, performed. The night's showstopper was when Dizzy Gillespie invited Jimmy to join him on stage, and the

⁴⁷ Donnie Radcliffe, "'Unfortunate' Snap Decision," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1977.

two of them sang the song “Salt Peanuts.”⁴⁸ Rosalynn hosted a stock car night in a nod to the President’s days in Georgia. In 1976, Jimmy kicked off his presidential campaign at the Atlanta Speedway and promised to invite the drivers and their crews to the White House if elected. He lived up to that promise, and they came to the White House as the First Lady invited over 500 guests to enjoy the music of Willie Nelson while enjoying a southern-style dinner. *Autoweek* ran an article discussing the NASCAR event at the White House. Jimmy Carter had been a fan of NASCAR even from his days as governor of Georgia, as he was known to invite drivers to the governor’s mansion. When the drivers were invited to the White House, Jimmy Carter was not present; however, due to his presence at Camp David, he was working on the Mideast Peace agreement. Rosalynn Carter hosted the dinner in his absence and opened the event by waving a green flag as the race show cars entered the White House driveway.⁴⁹ Rosalynn hosted an even larger event in 1979 when Pope John Paul II visited Washington, D.C., and officials from all over the country requested invitations. For this event, there was a total of 10,000 people in attendance at two separate outdoor receptions, with the National Symphony playing as the Pope walked through the crowd, blessing the individuals. *Time Magazine* ran an article that noted the mutual faith relationship and fought for human rights. “After their meeting, the pair emerged and addressed the crowd of 6,000 gathered on the South Lawn. There, the President addressed the Pope warmly and said, “As human beings each acting for justice in the present- and striving together for a common future of peace and love- let us not wait so long for ourselves and for you

⁴⁸ “Jimmy Carter, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach: ‘Salt Peanut,’” Accessed From Warren Senders, *YouTubevideo*, 3:35, April 21, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORhqJZfxxcI>.

⁴⁹ Mike Hembree, “The Year President Jimmy Carter Brought NASCAR to the White House,” *Autoweek*, December. 16. 2022.

to meet again. Welcome to our country, our new friend.”⁵⁰ Rosalynn also was involved in a series of televised Sunday performances from the East Room. In February 1978, Rosalynn held her first one featuring Vladimir Horowitz, and as the executive vice president of WETA, an affiliate of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), learned the famous pianist would be playing at the White House. They asked if they could televise the recital. Rosalynn agreed because she believed it would benefit the American public to hear what Horowitz offered. Therefore, the Sunday performances from the East Room became a regular event with different artists such as Andres Segovia, Isaac Stern, Dave Brubeck, Billy Taylor, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Leon. However, in 1979, PBS canceled the series due to the upcoming election season and the station needing to give equal time to the other candidates.⁵¹ The *New York Times* ran an article about culture in the Carter White House and the Sunday broadcasts in the East Room.

Since then, each of the Sunday artists has received a photo album from the White House, seeking to capture the highlights of the day; a videotape from PBS for their personal use and a nice letter from the Carters-but no cash, not even expense money. That has hardly deterred them from coming. Every performer who has been asked to come has come. Each was personally selected by the Carters, Mrs. Poston said, “because they represent perfection in their field.” So far, besides Mr. Horowitz, Mr. Rostropovich, and Mr. Segovia, there have been performances by singer Leontyne Price and ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov.⁵²

Rosalynn made every effort to make the White House feel like a home to the Carters. Besides Jimmy and Rosalynn living there, there was also their daughter Amy, Chip, and Caron, their young son, James Earl IV, and Jeff and his wife, Annette. They did have the addition of a tree house built in the backyard for their daughter Amy, where she and her friends spent the night

⁵⁰ Julia Zorthian, “The First Pope at the White House: Remembering 1979,” *Time*, September 22, 2015.

⁵¹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 97-100.

⁵² Byandrew J. Glass, “Culture in Carter’s White House,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 1979.

often. It was also noted that Amy and her friends liked to spend the night in the Lincoln bedroom and hoped to see the ghost of the former president. When hosting formal events, Rosalynn did not just invite dignitaries and socialites. She was also known for inviting average American citizens who had done something nice for them along their journey to the White House.⁵³

Not all of Rosalynn's dinners were for societal or entertaining gains, but some had political capital or net growth. She believed it was her duty to promote her husband's policies, and sometimes, she did that through her hosting duties. Once, Rosalynn believed that her husband was not receiving enough proper coverage from the press. Therefore, she persuaded him to host a series of informal dinners with journalists, including the anchors of significant networks' nightly news programs like Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw, and Frank Reynolds. The news media was not shedding favorable light on Jimmy Carter due to a negative perception of various fronts. Several controversies surrounded the Office of Management and Budget Director Bert Lance, the Justice Department, and Billy Carter. These incidents fueled the press's suspicions that Carter's administration was not above legal and ethical impropriety. Also, journalists were not impressed with Carter's handling of Congress. Carter's failure to conform to the expectation that a Democratic president with a large party majority in Congress would be an activist opened him up to severe press criticism.⁵⁴ She once hosted 1,000 African Americans on the South Lawn for a meeting about blacks in government. African Americans had supported Carter in large numbers in the election of 1976; however, once he had taken office, their position on his administration had diminished. They criticized him, stating that he had failed to increase

⁵³ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 101.

⁵⁴ Mark J. Rozell, "President Carter and the Press: Perspectives from White House Communications Advisers," *Political Science Quarterly* 105, 3 (1990): 420.

funding for programs to develop urban areas, create new jobs, and provide low-income housing. However, Carter had appointed more African Americans to federal judgeships than any of his predecessors, increased the number of government contracts for minority companies, and strengthened the enforcement of laws protecting voting rights. Jimmy Carter nominated lawyer U.W. Clemon to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, where, after his confirmation, he became the first Black lifetime federal judge in Alabama. Carter also nominated Myron Thompson, the first and only Black lifetime judge to ever serve on the Middle District of Alabama.⁵⁵ The First Lady also increased the attention of her passion projects through her hostess position of the First Lady. For her first Christmas in the White House, Rosalynn displayed a twenty-foot fir tree in the Blue Room decorated with 2,500 ornaments that a mentally handicapped individual had made. She wanted to show the tree to help erase the stigma surrounding mental disabilities.⁵⁶ She also hosted a luncheon for wives of current or retired senators, encouraging them to achieve the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1978. In 1977, Rosalynn hosted nineteen arrival ceremonies, forty receptions, fifteen luncheons, eight picnics, and eight dinners.⁵⁷

The Carters received criticism for how they ran the White House. Some missed the days of the glitz and glam of the Kennedys and the white-tie formal events of the predecessors. The *New York Times* ran an article noting the different tones and responses to the Carters in the White House. “I want my President to have some class,” Mr. Naylor said. “I’m not ready for a

⁵⁵ “President Carter’s Judicial Appointments Are Central to His Tremendous Civil Rights Legacy,” *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights*, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://civilrights.org/blog/president-carters-judicial-appointments-are-central-to-his-tremendous-civil-rights-legacy/>.

⁵⁶ “The Carters at Christmas,” *WHHA (En-US)*, accessed April 21, 2024, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/fotoware?id=B0E8E081D7824616+B56962C953E2F617>.

⁵⁷ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 103-104.

blue-jean image in the White House. I wonder how it looks to the world.”⁵⁸ There were also complaints about how the Carters served dinner at 7:30 instead of 8:00 and ended all functions by midnight. Rosalynn also cut out hard liquor at the White House, which people complained about. She argued that she saved taxpayers \$1 million by not having to buy the liquor or hire bartenders.⁵⁹ As one of her predecessors was nicknamed “Lemonade Lucy” Lucy Hayes, Rosalynn was nicknamed “Rose Rosalynn.”⁶⁰ As fiscally conservative, Carter’s limited the budget for items spent in the White House entertainment budget. The idea of giving gifts to foreign dignitaries was a custom, usually with a hefty price tag on them. Jimmy and Rosalynn limited the gifts to official visitors to a photograph of Jimmy and Rosalynn together in a frame with the presidential seal. Another critique of the Carters was their unwillingness to participate in Washington society. Generally, after one visit to the White House, the guest would reciprocate with a dinner and reception. Carter thought this was a waste of time; therefore, he decided to limit state visits to just one dinner. ⁶¹

Rosalynn was also busy working to redecorate the White House during her time as First Lady. Most of her changes were made using items from previous families because the government does not provide funding for furniture or artwork. Rosalynn borrowed from the collections of the White House. Also, Rosalynn Carter did not change every room, as the First Lady is not allowed to change every room in the White House, just the main living quarters.

⁵⁸ Douglas E. Kneeland, “Carter’s Style as President Has Drawn Mixed Reviews,” *The New York Times*, February 13, 1977.

⁵⁹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 105.

⁶⁰ “Lemonade Lucy” refers to Lucy Hayes wife of President Rutherford B. Hayes. She was a staunch supporter of the temperance movement. During her husband’s administration, alcohol was banned in the White House.

⁶¹ *Ibid*,106.

Rosalynn also worked with the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, established by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. Her main project was the solarium, which her daughter-in-law, Annette, aided her. It was considered the family room of the White House and is an octagonal, twenty by thirty-five-foot room with south-facing windows. She sought to make decorating additions and alterations to the White House that the public could enjoy on their tours. Rosalynn also purchased a bronze bust of Benjamin Franklin, William Michael Harnett's painting *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1888, and a portrait of Andrew Jackson, to name a few.⁶² The *Washington Post* ran an article detailing every change Rosalynn Carter made to the White House during her main tenure as First Lady.

Mrs. Carter's White House is very much in the Southern tradition. Like most Southerners, she is proud of her heritage of hospitality. There is a softness about the best of the Southern style, and this softness she brings to everything she does at the White House. This softness, by the way, is only in manner. Like the traditional Melanies of the South, Mrs. Carter seems to be a sturdy, strong woman who's not to be trifled with. Northerners frequently mistake the soft-spoken Southern accent, the quiet manner, the "after, you please" for lack of purpose. But Southern women of Mrs. Carter's generation were brought up to make decisions, push people into positions, and get things done behind the scenes – all with an air of "Who me? This little old thing?"⁶³

Rosalynn maintained a long workday that usually began around 9:00 a.m. She would take half an hour for lunch, which she would have with her husband or other family members, and she met twice a week with her staff. At 4:30, she tried to end her day with an activity with Jimmy outside, whether it was playing tennis, swimming, or taking a walk. Rosalynn was all about self-improvement; she took a speed reading class to help her in her job, and she loved to sew. She was very religious. Rosalynn and Jimmy loved Camp David, and they spent numerous weekends there. They went on nature trails, played tennis, jogged, and swam in the pool. It was a place

⁶² Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 109-110.

⁶³ Sarah Booth Conroy, "Toward Comfort for Some, Grandeur for All," *Washington Post*.

they could both relax. The connection between Rosalynn and Jimmy was solid. They made almost every decision together. Some stated that their affection towards one another was a test of their partnership.⁶⁴

Rosalynn Carter was a First Lady ready to take on an activism agenda, leaning on her background from her time as the First Lady of the Georgia governorship. She focused on developing her agenda around issues such as aid for the mentally handicapped, assistance for the elderly, volunteerism, childhood immunization, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. She wanted to be involved in independent projects that would complement her husband's policies and reflect well on his presidency. One of the first things she did while First Lady was establish a place in the White House where she could focus on her projects by creating an office in the East Wing.⁶⁵ Tourists regularly walked through the East Wing. To avoid contact with them daily and getting caught in conversation, she would travel through the basement in the winter and through the outside over the lawn when the weather was nice. No other First Lady had an office in the East Wing until Rosalynn Carter.⁶⁶ The office was very beneficial to Rosalynn. However, when the nation was facing an energy crisis, Jimmy responded by urging energy conservation. He urged the American population to turn the thermostats down, which he also did in the White House. The East Wing became so cold during the winter months that Mrs. Carter and her staff were forced to wear long underwear. Rosalynn pleaded with her husband to keep the thermostat at sixty-eight degrees; however, he refused. Rosalynn had an excellent staff

⁶⁴ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 110-112.

⁶⁵ "Mrs. Carter Works in Her East Wing Office," *WHHA (En-US)*, accessed April 21, 2024, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/fotoware?id=F2683247E7F04528+AAC86E02AF200BF4>.

⁶⁶ The Office of the First Lady has since served as the workplace for the initiatives the first lady and her staff pursue.

of well-trained women around her who helped her achieve her passion projects. She started with eighteen staff members, which was later increased to twenty-one.

Mary Hoyt was Rosalynn's chief press secretary. Her job included overseeing the East Wing's press office, coordinating media coverage of East Wing events, and holding press conferences. She was a liaison to the West Wing staff. Hoyt acted as Rosalynn's Chief of Staff until Rosalynn officially added this position to her staff in 1979. Kathy Cade was the director of the East Wing's Project's Issues and Research Office. She worked closely with Rosalynn on the issue of erasing the stigma of mental illness.⁶⁷ As the first First Lady to have her professional policy staff, she was committed to having them receive equal compensation for their work in the East Wing as their West Wing counterparts. Her professional policy staff helped in her fight for mental health awareness, help for the elderly, the passage of the ERA, and other passion projects of Rosalynn Carters. Jimmy, as fiscally conservative as he was, refused until Rosalynn kept persuading and demanding until he eventually gave in.

Regarding matters of conferring between the East and West wings, the two offices were in sink. Rosalynn and Jimmy were seen as an extension of one another; under the Carter administration, the First Lady position was understood to be an extension of the President. Rosalynn once noted, "We developed a mutual understanding about what to do and how to do it."⁶⁸ She was a firm representation of Jimmy. She not only helped draft his speeches, she proofread them, helped pick out clothes for him, was a listening ear, and was one of his closest advisors on critical matters. Rosalynn requested a working lunch every Wednesday at 12:30 with Jimmy to discuss projects, campaign strategy, foreign policy, and other issues. They had the

⁶⁷ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 35-36.

⁶⁸ Alter, *His Very Best*, 309.

meeting in the family dining room on the second floor of the White House. This was a first for a president and a First Lady. As this was a business meeting, they kept all personal matters for that night's dinner in the residence. Rosalynn was always eager to know the basis of Jimmy's policies and legislative agendas. When Jimmy entered the residence, Rosalynn had a line of questioning ready for him on matters concerning the American people. This way, she would be prepared for when she addressed the media or if she would communicate through her policies. She wanted the most up-to-date information and sometimes could not wait for their weekly lunches. Jimmy, therefore, decided that Rosalynn should attend Cabinet meetings. She was not an active participant, but she was able to hear the information as it was being discussed firsthand.⁶⁹ This was the first time a First Lady had ever sat in on a Presidential cabinet meeting, and the President was highly criticized. Rosalynn just sat along the wall with the aides and spoke to Jimmy after the meetings about what had transpired in the meetings, giving advice or counsel. The *War on the Rocks* ran an article that denoted, "Given that Mrs. Carter had entered into realms considered off-limits for a first lady, and given that the president said that she was aware of virtually all that was happening in the administration, some critics began to ask who was in charge of the country. There were those who called her "Mrs. President." Others, however, defended her, contending that she was the victim of sexism and that her roles as adviser and advocate were no different than those of any wife."⁷⁰ She did not attend the National Security Council Meetings because she did not have security clearance; there were some things that Rosalynn did not have the privilege to do.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "Rosalynn Carter on Attending Cabinet Meetings (C-SPAN)," *YouTube*, December 6, 2013, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPLbCuC4dUw>.

⁷⁰ "Rosalynn Carter: The First Lady and Foreign Policy," *War on the Rocks*, December 14, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/12/rosalynn-carter-the-first-lady-and-foreign-policy/>.

⁷¹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 309-310.

Mental health was a massive milestone of Rosalynn's passion projects. This was started on her agenda while she was the governor's wife of Georgia, continued while she was in the White House, yet did not stop once she left office. The White House had cited a figure of 20 million Americans, or about 10 percent of the population, who needed mental health care. However, for those seeking assistance for mental health care, health insurance covers about 10 percent of mental health-related expenses and 33 percent of general medical bills. Congress had been working on mental health for years with varying degrees of success but nothing on a wide scale. In 1955, Congress formed a mental health commission that recommended the establishment of community mental health centers, which had been implemented in the 1960s. In 1965, another commission suggested that children's health needs needed greater attention. However, the idea did not gain much traction. No commission had been created to address the mental health system in its entirety and work on the crisis that was becoming so disjointed and unorganized. Short and long-term mental hospitals, nursing homes, and community health centers and self-help groups all were working towards improving mental health, but there was no cohesiveness towards addressing the stigma or care of mental health on a uniform basis. Peter Bourne, who had worked with Rosalynn on health issues in Georgia, consulted Thomas Bryant, who worked for the Lyndon Johnson administration as head of the Office of Economic Opportunity's Emergency Food and Medical Services Program, came together with John Garner to suggest a study of the national mental health system. They indicated that the best way to attack the stigma of mental health was to have Jimmy establish a commission to examine it.⁷² In 1976, they sent Rosalynn a memorandum outlining the commission's proposal for a body established

⁷² Gerald N Grob, "Public Policy and Mental Illnesses: Jimmy Carter's Presidential Commission on Mental Health," *The Milbank Quarterly*, 2005.

by an executive order, which was made up of approximately twenty people. The commission would focus on issues such as retardation, schizophrenia, and behavior problems such as alcoholism and drug abuse.⁷³

In February 1977, the President's Commission on Mental Health was born through an executive order. The East Wing received hundreds of letters related to this matter, thanking the First Lady for taking up this cause. Rosalynn also received recommendations from interest groups and lawmakers urging her to consider certain people for positions on the committee. Others just recommended subjects the groups should study, like the effects of working with the mentally ill or the effects of psychological treatments for those with mental problems. The commission comprised twelve men and eight women, including three African Americans, one Native American, and two Hispanics. This was a disease that affected everyone, no matter what your age, race, religion, or sex. This proved to be a heavy burden on the commission as they were to try and find solutions. The commission decided to complete their research by traveling to different areas of the country that were diverse in their geographic locations and the demographics of the people living there. They held public hearings during May and June where people could provide written or oral testimony. The first hearing was held on May 24 in Philadelphia, an industrialized city, then in Nashville, a more rural population. Then, in Tucson and San Francisco, there is a more Hispanic, Asian, and Native American population. Around 200 individuals appeared, and another 200 provided written testimony. They heard a wide range of concerns, such as the fragmentation of the mental health care system, the lack of funding, patients not getting the help they needed, farm labor contractors often enticing former patients to work for them but failing to provide mental health care services, lack of doctors and programs in

⁷³ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 37-38.

rural areas, the failure of Mexican Americans to use the services available to them properly, the harmful impact of urbanization on Native Americans, and the lack of organized services for the elderly.⁷⁴

The final report concluded that the 10 percent of Americans needing mental health care was probably low as it was closer to fifteen percent. The commission found that four groups of Americans lacked proper care: racial and ethnic minorities, children, the elderly, and those with chronic mental illness. The final report also made 117 recommendations under eight primary headings: improving community support for those with mental disabilities, making the mental health system more responsive, providing better insurance coverage for those with mental disabilities, increasing the number of mental health workers, including minorities, and encouraging more mental health personnel to work in underserved parts of the country, protecting the rights of those with mental disabilities, increasing funding for research into mental illness, establishing a Center for Prevention within the National Institute of Mental Health, and taking steps to eliminate the stigma associated with mental disability. One of the main recommendations was for the federal government to provide support and for the state and local governments to step up. Several suggestions looked at what could be done at the community level because most individuals seek support from their friends, family, or local doctors. Therefore, there was a significant push to provide federal funding to establish community services where they were lacking or improve existing services. In the Community Mental Health Centers Act, passed in 1963, the commission called for revisions as it was not filling the needs of the American people. It was created to establish community mental health facilities so that those

⁷⁴ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 38-44.

who had been institutionalized in mental health facilities could receive local care.⁷⁵ The proposal by the commission stated that such centers receive funding even if they offer only one service to mentally ill patients. Rosalynn knew her husband would not accept the commission's proposals if the price tag was high, so she told the commissioners to keep the total costs low. Carter liked the proposal. Carter addressed the Commission on Mental Health in his Remarks on Receiving the Commission's Final Report speech on April 27, 1978, stating, "I have looked through this report, and Rosalynn has explained to me the major thrust of it. It is a superb analysis of the problems that we still have in the adequate delivery of mental health care to the people of the country."⁷⁶ Some of the recommendations required no additional expenditures by the federal government; however, others were significant.⁷⁷

In the implementation of the commission's report, Rosalynn did find snags. Scandals surrounded some critical commission leaders, including Bourne, who resigned to save the report from humiliation. Dr. Peter Bourne was the director of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy, where he supervised both supply-side substance control strategies and the demand-side of programs. Bourne, in his capacity, advocated for marijuana decriminalization, spraying drug fields in Mexico with herbicide, and increased regulations for barbiturates. Political opponents capitalized on Bourne's hypocrisy after he was found prescribing the sedative methaqualone to a White House staffer under a false name. Bourne resigned in disgrace.⁷⁸ Therefore, to carry out the

⁷⁵ Mental Retardation Facilities Construction Act, 1963.

⁷⁶ "President's Commission on Mental Health Remarks on Receiving the Commission's Final Report." *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/presidents-commission-mental-health-remarks-receiving-the-commissions-final-report>.

⁷⁷ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 38-44.

⁷⁸ Claire D Clark and Emily Dufton, "Peter Bourne's Drug Policy and the Perils of a Public Health Ethic, 1976-1978," *American journal of public health*, February 2015.

policies of the report, it fell to the Department of Education, Health, and Welfare (HEW) Secretary Joseph Califano.

Califano was stuck in the middle of trying to please both Rosalynn and Jimmy on the issue. Rosalynn resented Califano, who she deemed that was getting her policies on mental health nowhere. Rosalynn decided to get congressional support on the issue of mental health. She met with state mental health officials, representatives from the American Psychiatric Association, and various minority, women's, and children's advocacy groups. Throughout these meetings, she urged them to contact their representatives and have them pass a spending bill to help increase funding for the mental health crisis. In February of 1979, Rosalynn was the second First Lady to appear before the Senate Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research to testify on Capitol Hill. She testified about what she had learned during the commissions' hearings around the United States and summarized the final results.⁷⁹ Rosalynn then discovered that HEW had been delaying the submission of the spending bill. The legislation needed to arrive at Congress before May 15, or they may not have time to act on it as part of the 1980 budget. On May 15, Jimmy submitted the Mental Health Systems Act to Congress, endorsed by Senator Ted Kennedy and Representative Henry Waxman with the promise of passage⁸⁰. Jimmy decided to remove Califano from his cabinet in a shakeup of his cabinet. Rosalynn had one more step to get the passage of the Mental Health Systems Act passed, and that was acting on the bill before Superfund, known as the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability

⁷⁹ "Mental Health Parity Hearing: First Lady Rosalynn Carter," Accessed From the Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats, *YouTubevideo*, 7:14, April 26, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIXuqjPew6Y>.

⁸⁰ Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Mental Health System Act, 96th Congress, 1980, HR Rep. 96-977.

Act. This act was created to fund the clean-up of hazardous waste sites.⁸¹ Rosalynn's project staff leader, Cade, felt that if Congress did not meet on the Mental Health Act first, they would kill the bill. She took matters into her own hands and explained the situation to Rosalynn, who contacted the Commerce Committee's chairman. In return, The Mental Health System Act was passed, and it shifted the financing of mental health care from large hospitals to community programs, gave the states more lead way in providing grants for mental health, and authorized more money for mental health. This was a massive win for the First Lady.⁸²

Assistance for the elderly was another passion project of Rosalynn's. Not only was this issue close to Rosalynn as she witnessed the needs that were not being met for older Americans, but when her grandmother died, her grandfather moved in with her family, and she saw first-hand the effects of aging. Rosalynn's mother worked until she was seventy at the local post office in Georgia; when she retired, Rosalynn thought she would love to relax and enjoy her leisure time. Rosalynn's mother made a statement that impacted her: "No one thinks I can do good work anymore."⁸³ Rosalynn was influenced by her mother and her mother-in-law, who, at age sixty-eight, joined the Peace Corps, and Jimmy's uncle was in his late eighties and still worked his days as a salesman. Rosalynn was determined to abolish mandatory age retirement. In May of 1977, she hosted a roundtable on the topic of the elderly that included nearly two dozen experts. They talked about health care, nutrition, and mandatory retirement in the discussions. Rosalynn lobbied Congress for the passage of specific bills to aid the elderly.

⁸¹ EPA, n.d., accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-comprehensive-environmental-response-compensation-and-liability-act>.

⁸² Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 44-48.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 49.

Congress passed the Rural Health Clinics Act in 1977, which increased access to health care for recipients of Medicare and Medicaid.⁸⁴ In 1978, Congress added a provision to the 1967 Age Discrimination in Employment Act that banned mandatory retirement in the federal government and raised the mandatory retirement age in the private sector from sixty-five to seventy.⁸⁵ The Older Americans Act was amended in 1978, which increased funding for health and nutrition programs for the elderly and established a program to investigate nursing home complaints.⁸⁶ The First Lady successfully increased knowledge and awareness for a group in the population that tended to be overlooked, even though they were growing due to the increased aging population.⁸⁷

Volunteerism was another staple of Rosalynn's First Lady agenda as she learned that the government could pour money into these programs for those in need, but "if there's not someone in the community that cares, well, the problem is not solved."⁸⁸ Rosalynn started her volunteerism in D.C. by pledging to improve DC General Hospital. The hospital had lost its accreditation due to poor record keeping and dangerous working conditions. In May 1978, Rosalynn helped paint the emergency room, and it was that same month she learned that the hospital's accreditation had been reinstated. Rosalynn's agenda of volunteerism fits in with her husband's agenda to provide help to communities in need of assistance. Jimmy, through his

⁸⁴"NARHC," *National Association of Rural Health Clinics*, accessed April 26, 2024, https://www.narhc.org/narhc/RHC_Burden_Reduction_Act.asp.

⁸⁵ "The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967," *US EEOC*, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/age-discrimination-employment-act-1967>.

⁸⁶ "Older Americans Act," *ACL Administration for Community Living*, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://acl.gov/about-acl/authorizing-statutes/older-americans-act>.

⁸⁷ Kaufman, Rosalynn Carter, 50.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 51.

fiscal conservatism, did not want to pump large amounts of federal funding into communities in need. Instead, he tried to use existing funds more efficiently. This is where the First Lady's agenda of volunteerism would come into play. The media dubbed what would be known as the Rosalynn Plan, a program designed to get Americans to volunteer their time and money for neighborhood beautification programs and help those in need. Initially, this was just a program for Washington, D.C. However, it eventually spread across the United States as she traveled across the country, highlighting groups working to help improve their community. These trips served a dual purpose: she could serve as eyes and ears for the president by listening to any concerns the American public had and identifying programs worthy of federal support. By finding merit-based programs, she could counsel Jimmy to loosen up the purse strings and help fund some of the projects through federal grants. One of those projects was Project Propinquity or Communities in Schools, founded in the early 1970s by Bill Milliken. Milliken had ties to the Carters as he knew Clarence Jordan, the uncle of Hamilton Jordan, one of Jimmy's chief aides. Clarence led an interracial religious commune near the Carter's hometown in Plains.

Project Propinquity was to help youth living in impoverished areas stay in school and provide assistance to those who had dropped out, had learning disabilities, or had emotional problems. This project aimed to support adolescents, allowing them to gain skills and knowledge that would reduce the need for social welfare dependency. The variables used to assess the student's achievements were attendance, scores in reading and mathematics, disruptive behavior incidents, attitudes toward school, and grades in regular school subjects.⁸⁹ With the help of Rosalynn and Jimmy, Project Propinquity expanded to other cities throughout the United States,

⁸⁹ Helen Branch, "Project PROPINQUITY 1975-76. Research and Evaluation Report, Volume 10, Number 4, September 1976.," ERIC, August 31, 1976, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED131145>.

such as Atlanta, New York, and Indianapolis. Another program that was a favorite of Rosalynn's was the Green Door, which Gail Marker and Ellen McPeake in Washington, D.C. The purpose of this program was to take eligible mentally ill patients out of local hospitals and give them more normal lives. Through the use of volunteers, the mentally ill patients could obtain part-time jobs and housing where they would live with fellow patients under supervision. This program thrived, and it was noted that by 2006, Green Door had helped about 3,000 individuals in Washington, D.C., leave mental facilities and homeless shelters, leading more productive lives.⁹⁰ Green Door Behavioral Health offers rehabilitation, housing, employment, and other supports. It is designed to help people live rich, full lives despite their challenges.⁹¹

Childhood immunization was a staple in Rosalynn's agenda as First Lady. This hallmark piece was in conjunction with Betty Bumpers, the wife of Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas. Betty Bumpers had been working on eliminating measles but had found little support in the previous White House. Yet, Rosalynn was willing to champion the effort of generating awareness of childhood illness and immunization. By 1979, the effort had paid off by achieving a goal of immunizing 90 percent of all American children and all but eradicating measles. Other childhood illnesses, such as diphtheria and tetanus, had been dramatically reduced.⁹²

Rosalynn succeeded in almost all of her passion projects. However, one area of her agenda that she failed in was the passage of the ERA or the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1923, Alice Paul drafted the amendment arguing that even though women had the right to vote, they were not guaranteed equal rights. The amendment required approval by two-thirds of both

⁹⁰ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 51-54.

⁹¹ "Green Door Behavioral Health," Idealist, accessed May 27, 2024, [https://www.idealists.org/en/nonprofit/f448db6031404aeb91ff5f1d3f9f7ab4-green-door-behavioral-health-washington#:~:text=A%20501\(c\)\(3,illness%20and%20substance%20use%20disorders.](https://www.idealists.org/en/nonprofit/f448db6031404aeb91ff5f1d3f9f7ab4-green-door-behavioral-health-washington#:~:text=A%20501(c)(3,illness%20and%20substance%20use%20disorders.)

⁹² *Ibid*, 54.

houses of Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states before it would be officially added to the Constitution. In the 1960s, attitudes toward the support of the amendment began to change as the fight for women's equality began to brew again. The 1960s saw the number of women attending college increase. However, the 1963 Presidential Commission on the Status of Women found that women still faced discrimination both in education and in the workplace. In 1963, *The Feminine Mystique*, written by Betty Friedan, talked about the dissatisfaction many women felt with the American culture that tried to relegate them to the home. In 1972, the proposed amendment reached the floor of the House of Representatives, and it was adopted. The following year, the Senate endorsed its language. The amendment was then set on a seven-year time limit for the amendment's ratification by the states. The deadline was March 22, 1979.

When Rosalynn reached office, thirty-four states ratified the amendment; however, there needed to be thirty-eight for the amendment to pass. An antifeminist group led by Phyllis Schlafly called STOP or Stop Taking Our Privileges was created, stating that the ERA would subject women to the military draft, open the door to same-sex marriage, permit abortions, and take power away from the states.⁹³ Rosalynn responded to Schlafly's claim: "To me that Equal Rights Amendment means that women have equal legal rights and should get equal pay for equal work. While traveling through the states, I found some state laws where a woman could not get auto insurance without a man's signature."⁹⁴

Rosalynn used her influence as First Lady to call state legislature members floundering on the issue to try and persuade them to vote for the passage of the ERA. Some state officials resented her for interfering with their state affairs. In February of 1977, Schlafly led a gathering

⁹³ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 54-55.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 55.

of 150 anti-ERA protesters outside of the White House, accusing Rosalynn's phone calls of violating Article V of the Constitution, which left the ratification of amendments to Congress and the state legislature. Even the feminists did not all support Rosalynn's work for the ERA. The relationship between Rosalynn and the feminists was strained due to Rosalynn's position on abortion. Throughout the campaign season and while in office, Rosalynn had stuck by her position that she supported neither the overturning of *Roe V. Wade* nor the passage of a constitutional amendment banning abortion. She was personally opposed to abortion because it violated her religious and moral beliefs.

Feminists thought this was a key hallmark of their cause and did not appreciate Rosalynn taking a halfway stance. Rosalynn's cause with the feminists was not helped by Jimmy's administration not doing more for women. Feminists thought Rosalynn could take a more permanent stance on issues in the public forum. He had done more on record than his predecessors in appointing women to high administrative posts, but they still felt it was not enough. The *New York Times* ran an article examining Jimmy Carter's stance on why feminists are critical of his position. "The women's groups are also unhappy because they compiled a list of about 1,500 qualified women for almost all policy-level jobs, but they say most of these names were never examined. The women further say that the leaders of the Carter talent search lamented their inability to find "qualified women" and turned to men instead."⁹⁵ Jimmy was also against abortion but was opposed to overturning *Roe v. Wade*. However, he strictly enforced federal laws that limited the use of medical funds to pay for abortions. Rosalynn stood because women were independent and had voices that needed to be heard. She used her influence in the

⁹⁵ Nancy Hicks, "Feminists Critical of Carter on Jobs," *The New York Times*, February 8, 1977.

Oval Office to promote women's rights.⁹⁶ However, she publicly refused to disagree with her husband on issues. Rosalynn thought that disagreeing with her husband's decision-making publicly would be a "tacky thing to do." Feminist Gloria Steinem rejected Rosalynn's argument, stating, "More than any other president's wife I have seen, there is no independent thought or phrasing separate from his."⁹⁷ Feminists appreciated what Rosalynn did for the ERA but felt she was not doing all she could for women. The ERA did fail to be ratified by the states due to a lack of support at the state level.

Rosalynn Carter revolutionized the office of the First Lady. By being considered an extension of her husband, the President of the United States, she created valuable change that affected the social and political outcomes of the American public for generations to come. By having an equal partnership with her husband, she sought her counsel on matters of his foreign and domestic administration, as seen through their weekly lunches and her being allowed in cabinet meetings. Rosalynn connected with her role and enhanced her husband's policies and agenda. She also listened to the plight of the individuals and took that back to her husband to effect change. Rosalynn was not a First Lady who just found joy in the ceremonial hosting and decorating of the White House. She was a First Lady who expanded on the precedents set by Edith Wilson and Eleanor Roosevelt. She expanded on the role of the First Lady with her passion projects and missions to enact change for the American public. From mental health, volunteerism, immunization, ERA, and help for the elderly, Rosalynn broke barriers during this period and created lasting change that is still in effect today. Rosalynn Carter is an icon that First Ladies have mimicked because of her social activism. Lauren Thatcher Ulrich once said, "Well

⁹⁶ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 55-56.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 57.

Behaved Women Seldom Make History.”⁹⁸ Jimmy Carter had a productive term in the White House, although he was not reelected in 1980 for a second term. He accomplished much in his one term as President of the United States, with Rosalynn as an equal partner in life and business.

⁹⁸ “Library Blog,” *Library Blog - LibGuides at Central Penn College*, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://guides.centralpenn.edu/blog/Well-Behaved-Women-Seldom-Make-History-Quotes-and-Context-for-Womens-History-Month>.

Chapter 6

Jimmy and the White House

Presidential reputations often live and die based on what each man accomplished as President of the United States. Presidents are either remembered for their valiant efforts in the face of adversity, their leadership through the turmoil of war, or their blunders through political scandals. The American public deems a president's worthiness based on their reactions to domestic and foreign policy. Throughout history, Franklin D. Roosevelt has been regarded as a well-liked President through his New Deal policies and entering into World War II. Americans returned to work, and the Great Depression was over. Jobs were provided along with assistance and hope to a downtrodden country. America was officially attacked on our home soil at Pearl Harbor, which led to the United States entering World War II. Franklin D. Roosevelt prompted America and rallied the troops to support a common cause. Abraham Lincoln, another well-regarded President, led the Union through the Civil War "with malice towards none." George Washington, America's first President, caps off the top three Presidents as he led the nation into a beacon of democracy under the new constitution. Franklin Pierce, however, was regarded as one of the worst Presidents of all time. Pierce, a heavy alcoholic, believed in national expansion of the borders even at the cost of adding more slave states, which eventually resulted in the Civil War. William Harding was seen as one of the most popular presidents in history while he was in office; however, after his death, scandals were revealed, such as the Teapot Dome scandals and extramarital affairs. James Buchanan rounds off the list of worst presidents. His sympathy towards the South and reluctance to stop the first seven states from seceding led to the Civil War. Presidential historian Richard Norton Smith noted ten rules for presidential evaluations that have withstood the test of time: history rewards the risk-takers, a president who actively campaigns for a historical place is engaged in a self-defeating exercise, there is no single theory for

presidential success, presidents can only be understood within the context of their time, if any law governs presidents beyond the Constitution it is the law of unintended consequences, presidential power is mainly based on moral authority, at times the president requires a talent for making useful enemies, every great president marches to the beat of his drum, the challenge posed by any crisis is an opportunity for leaders to forge an emotional bond with the people they lead, this also provides a chance to gain the moral authority and expand powers, and greatness is in the eye of the beholder.¹ Siena College Research Institute surveys the U.S. Presidents during their second year of the first term of their presidency. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 141 presidential scholars, historians, and political scientists who responded via mail or the web. The respondents ranked each of the 45 presidents on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) based on twenty categories that included attributes like background, imagination, integrity, intelligence, luck, willingness to take risks, compromising, executive ability, leadership, communication, party leadership, relationship with Congress, court appointments, handling the economy, executive appointments, domestic accomplishments, foreign policy accomplishments, and avoiding mistakes.² Presidents hold a great deal of power, and how they wield that power is reflected in the views of the American public and their perception of the president's term in office. Tides are changing, and revisionist historians are reexamining presidential reigns and reevaluating their stamp on American society, both socially and politically.

¹ "Ten Ways to Judge a President," *Knowledge at Wharton*, accessed February 25, 2024, <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/podcast/knowledge-at-wharton-podcast/ten-ways-to-judge-a-president/>.

² *American Presidents: Greatest and Worst*, accessed February 25, 2024, <https://scri.siena.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/draft-final.pdf>.

Jimmy Carter became the 39th President of the United States, elected in November of 1976. Historians' opinions on Carter have changed in recent years. He has been accepted as one of American history's most misunderstood and underrated presidents. His overall rank in the list of American presidents for 2022 was at 24.³ However, when he left office after being defeated by Ronald Reagan in the election of 1980, the American public's opinion was much less favorable towards him. Historians like Robert A. Pastor and Bill Galston have looked back at Carter's administration and noted he had various positives that changed the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Carter made human rights a hallmark of his presidency and negotiated the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel. He normalized diplomatic and trade relations with China and signed the Panama Canal Treaty. Domestically, Carter established the Department of Energy and the Department of Education and deregulated the airline industry. Carter did have some political blunders, like the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the 444-day hostage crisis in Iran, and surging inflation. In his one term as President of the United States, he accomplished a lot for the nation that the American people overlooked while he was in office.⁴ Throughout Carter's term in the White House and his tenure campaigning for office, Carter continued to rise to different occasions that presented themselves around the nation. From rafting down the Salmon River to conducting speeches and handshakes and steamboating down the Mississippi, Jimmy Carter set a new tone for the presidency. That is why his approval ratings in the Gallup and other polls have been so mercurial.

Before the Lance affair, he honeymooned with 75 percent approval; 18 months later he had drifted below 40 percent, was being called a "one term President," and brought in a new image maker. Then came the Camp David summit sessions, with hopes for Middle

³ *American Presidents: Greatest and Worst*, accessed February 25, 2024, <https://scri.siena.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/draft-final.pdf>.

⁴ Caitlin Clark, "How Will We Remember Jimmy Carter?," *Texas A&M University College of Arts and Sciences*, March 9, 2003, <https://artsci.tamu.edu/news/2023/03/how-will-we-remember-jimmy-carter.html>.

East peace and with an approval rating rising to 56 percent. Then Gallup poll approval sank below 30 percent by October 1979, with the nation sensing a lack of leadership at home and abroad, with double-digit inflation rampant and with no clear solution for the energy dilemmas. Suddenly, however, the national adrenalin was aroused, first by the Iranian hostage seizure and then by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; with patriotic fervor support for the President rose to 61 percent, and he pledged not to go beyond the Rose Garden until the hostages were freed; but after a time he had to go outside with poll approval trailing off by late Spring 1980 to the 30 percent level, nearing the Nixon and Truman lows.⁵

Jimmy Carter established a moral undertone and created a new American social and political fabric that would last for generations.

After Carter was elected President of the United States, he, like Presidents before him, started to assemble his staff. He knew he wanted to select members from Georgia who had served with him as governor and had worked with him as a presidential candidate. His predecessors had been criticized for installing their “cronies” into White House positions. However, he knew they had chosen wisely as he had confidently chosen from well-known associates. Hamilton Jordan had been Carter’s campaign manager in his gubernatorial race in 1970 and served as his Executive secretary while governor of Georgia. He also functioned as Carter’s campaign manager for his presidential campaign in 1976, to which the press underestimated him at every turn. When Carter was elected president, Jordan fulfilled the chief of staff role, for which he worked long hours during crucial periods. He oversaw personnel selections, coordinated staff activities, and represented Carter in routine dealings with Cabinet officers. Jordan also served as a special emissary during the Panama Canal treaties negotiations and efforts to free the Americans held hostage in Iran. Jody Powell had also been with Carter since his time as governor in Georgia and worked well with the press. Powell served as Carter’s press secretary in both capacities. He was known for giving Carter feedback on his speeches and

⁵ R. Gordon Hoxie, “Staffing the Ford and Carter Presidencies,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 3: 378–401, accessed Summer 1980.

developing answers for his press briefings. Powell and Carter had a special relationship. They traveled nationwide together on the campaign trail and established a narrative of how to spin Carter as a Presidential candidate. Once Carter was elected, Powell was involved in every presidential press briefing and statement. The press knew Powell's remarks were accurate as if they had come from Carter himself. This was because Powell and Carter had a long-standing working relationship. Therefore, whatever Powell said was a direct reflection of Carter. Frank Moore became the leader of the congressional liaison group, whereas before, he worked as executive secretary to the governor. Moore recruited knowledgeable people to work on Capitol Hill, keep track of the voluminous legislation being considered, and provide some continuity in the efforts put into Carter's campaign commitments. Jack Watson was chairman of the Georgia Human Resources Board while Carter was governor. Watson was effective in explaining complex and unpopular issues to the public. When Carter was elected to the Presidency, Watson was asked to coordinate the transition team from candidate to President and then chosen for the dual role of Cabinet Secretary and Assistant of Government Affairs. He was responsible for seeing those various leaders of government agencies work in harmony and ensuring that governors and other state and local officials had an effective representative in Washington. Some of his other duties were to arrange cabinet meetings, prepare the minutes, and ensure that they were implemented correctly and without delay when new laws were passed. Watson was also named Chief of Staff after Jordan left to coordinate Carter's reelection campaign for the election of 1980. Stuart Eizenstat had helped run Carter's campaign on policy issues and took the role of legislative initiative in the White House office. He was responsible for preparing the legislative proposals and monitoring the significant bills and resolutions being considered by Congress.

Carter chose his staff with great care to represent him and work with him in his causes to create a new progressive nation for the American people.⁶

The role of the Vice President transformed under Carter's administration. For nearly two hundred years, the vice president had little to no real power other than the constitutional authority to break ties in the Senate. During the transition process, however, Carter was surprised to learn that his vice president, Walter Mondale, was not briefed on the use of nuclear weapons. With an office in the Senate, the vice president had been viewed mainly as a member of the legislative branch. Carter changed this when he "executivized" the office and revolutionized the vice presidency. Carter promised Mondale a significant role in his administration. He needed someone with Washington experience. Carter also broke with traditional models and treated Mondale as his "assistant president." Carter told his staff, "If you get an order from Fritz, it's as if it's an order from me."⁷ At the beginning of the administration, Mondale sent Carter an eleven-page memo requesting specific responsibilities, such as including consultation on every significant decision. Carter approved these requests. Mondale wanted to be a general adviser and liaison to essential constituents. Vice President Mondale and his staff were given unprecedented access to the President and his senior advisers and to the flow of information in the White House. After taking the oath, one of Carter's first executive offices was to include the vice president in the military chain of command. Before, if the president was incapacitated, the military could make life-or-death decisions on its authority. With the addition of the new powers of the vice presidency, his day-to-day life changed. Until the Carter administration, vice presidents weren't granted an office in the West Wing. Their office was across the street in the Old Executive

⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 43-48.

⁷ Alter, *His Very Best*, 289.

Office Building. Carter, therefore, gave an extensive suite to Mondale just down the hall from the Oval Office and declared the vice presidential staffers had the status and perks of his aides. Carter also made sure that Mondale was brought in on all major decisions. Mondale participated in the selection of Cabinet members and other officials. He and his staff members headed several task forces assigned to develop programs and long-range goals for the administration, including the stimulus package and the President's Reorganization Project, to recommend improvements in the effectiveness of the federal bureaucracy.⁸ The two men had excellent communication skills, and it was very rare for them to argue. Carter began to hold weekly lunches with Mondale, sometimes even holding two lunches weekly, one on domestic issues and one on national security. This was one of the most significant tools that strengthened the American constitutional system for generations.⁹

Carter's daily schedule usually began around eight a.m., as he previously approved and scheduled meetings throughout the day. They lasted anywhere from two or three minutes for a ceremonial photograph to many hours, depending on the topic that was going to be discussed. Rosalynn and Carter decided early on that there were many decisions that they needed to make together, from decisions about the mansion, correspondences, public events, official and personal visitors, and the family budget. Carter did not want to go to the residence each night and have to answer the questions, so every Wednesday, they had a working lunch to answer such questions. Fritz Mondale and Carter had a standing lunch engagement every Monday whenever they were both in town. Powell, Brzezinski, and Hamilton were Carter's most frequent unscheduled visitors to the Oval Office. Other staff members or Cabinet officers would call ahead of time to be sure it

⁸ Walter Mondale Biography, *Minnesota Historical Society*, accessed May 6, 2024, <https://www.mnhs.org/mondale/biography>.

⁹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 289-290.

was alright to come to the Oval Office. As a general rule, Carter liked to receive questions and advice in writing. He thought this was a time saver as it reduced the length of conversations. He could read a brief memorandum in moments and decide at any point of the day. Between appointments, Carter managed the mountain of paperwork that demanded Presidential approval, such as proposals from Cabinet officers, correspondences to sign, presidential appointments to central executive posts to be considered, reports from meetings in the Situation Room on foreign, intelligence, or defense subjects, facts about legislation before Congress, or proposals being developed to send to Capitol Hill. One of the criticisms that Carter received while in office was from Gaddis Smith, who said that Carter had taken the anti-Washington approach as an outsider. He stated: "that anyone who had been in Washington before the arrival of Jimmy Carter was tainted."¹⁰ This would backfire on Carter as he would govern the country, and the majority of the Democratic Congress was not willingly ready to embrace Carter as an ally in the Executive Branch. Carter took papers back to the residence to read at night, but it started to take a toll on him. He did not have any free time. Carter arranged for his staff, Rosalynn, and himself to take a speed reading course to improve their ability to amass the paperwork that came with the job. This tremendously helped when reading through the paperwork that came across the President's desk. Carter knew that his administration would only be effective if all members worked together and they could master the country's critical issues and find solutions to the problems at bay.¹¹

Cabinet meetings, at first, were held every Monday morning for two-hour sessions. Carter found that the collegial approach to dealing with the Cabinet members worked well in the sessions. Treating the group as equals worked since they carried out the decisions and explained

¹⁰ Russell D. Motter, "Jimmy Carter in Context," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 45, 4 (1992): 472.

¹¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 58-60.

them to the public. Carter did have a problem with leaks from his Cabinet meetings. He considered opening his meetings to the press; however, members of the Cabinet did not want the press involved. Still, they later found that most of their deliberations reached the media after each meeting in a highly distorted form. After a few months, Cabinet meetings were less necessary. They stopped meeting as often and only met in smaller sessions restricted to domestic and foreign issues or a single subject of interest within several departments. *New York Times* noted in an article that “‘He’s given up on the show-and-tell sessions we used to have in the early days in which he went around the table calling on each member to speak his piece,’ Mr. Bergland said in an interview, ‘Now, he has his agenda, which none of us sees in advance, and he sets the pace and tone.’”¹² Carter had thirty-six cabinet meetings in his first year with a full Cabinet. The meetings were reduced significantly during the next three years to twenty-three, nine, and six. Carter’s cabinet was the most stable in modern history. He waited more than three months before he replaced a Cabinet member.¹³

Carter told his supporters on the campaign trail, “If I ever lie to you if I ever make a misleading statement, don’t vote for me. I would not deserve to be your President.”¹⁴ This is a statement that Carter took seriously on the campaign trail and something that he took even more seriously as President of the United States. Carter admired President Harry S. Truman as he studied his career and Presidency more than any other President. He considered him direct, honest, old-fashioned, bound to his hometown roots, courageous when facing challenges, and

¹² Terence Smith, *The New York Times*. "A Visit to Cabinet Meeting: Carter Sets the Pace and Tone: Meetings Last Two Hours Visit to Session of Cabinet: Carter Sets Pace and Tone A Nod to an Empty Chair Secretaries are Criticized Ladies and Gentlemen." *New York Times*, May 22, 1979. 2.

¹³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 60-64.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 69.

willing to be unpopular when he believed his decisions were suitable for the country. A lot of the difficulties that Truman and Carter faced were in the Middle East, China, oil, and natural gas. Carter noted in his plan for a foreign policy attack that he followed the example of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Carter liked how Truman appointed strong advisors, listened closely, and then took the issues to the American people.¹⁵ Other difficulties included Poland, nuclear weapons, Soviet adventurism, human rights, and fights with the Democratic Party's liberal wing. Carter wanted to be President, and a good one, yet he did not wish to go down in history as a good leader who had won a war he had started. He wanted to maintain peace and successfully meet the nation's challenges. Carter investigated issues like human rights, nuclear arms control, and the Middle East for his foreign policy initiatives. When it came to domestic issues, Carter had a plethora of issues to focus on, such as achieving maximum bureaucratic efficiency, reorganizing the government, creating jobs, deregulating significant industries, and addressing the energy problem. Carter focused his attention on chronicling wasteful water projects, welfare and tax reforms, environmental quality, restoring the moral fiber of the government, and openness and honesty in dealing with the press and public. Carter felt it was time to restore the American people's confidence in the government's ability to protect them.¹⁶

As president and citizen, Carter was very frugal and had a contempt for waste. This shaped his presidency from budget cuts to penny-pinching in the Residence. Carter was known for switching off the lights, turning down the thermostats, and insisting that the stairwells be unlocked so that he could go up and down the stairs rather than take the elevator. Former President Thomas Jefferson stood in line for lunch on his Inauguration Day, and Harry S.

¹⁵ Carter on Foreign Policy (1), box 25, Michael Raoul- Duval Papers, Gerald R. Ford., Ann, Arbor, Michigan.

¹⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 70.

Truman washed out his socks. The least he could do was convince the Secret Service to end the practice of opening the door every time he wanted to go to a different room. Nixon's stretch limousine was replaced with a smaller black sedan, and Rosalynn refused to spend the total amount of taxpayer funds to redecorate the White House. Hugh Carter, Jr. helped run the presidential campaign for his cousin, President Carter, who became an aide in reining in the White House budget, earning him the nickname "Cousin Cheap." Carter told Hugh that having 325 television sets and 220 FM radios in the White House offices "makes me sick." Hugh scaled back everything, even the \$85,000 a year spent on subscriptions to newspapers and magazines. *The Washington Post* wrote an article noting, "After the stories of disappearing television sets, limousines dispatched to the graveyard and restrictions on newspaper and magazine subscriptions the White House staff is now allowed, one expects to meet a gnarled Scrooge who delights in the picayane."¹⁷ Carter de-pomped the White House, but many Americans did not want that. *The Washington Post* wrote an article noting.

For once, Washington and the rest of the country seem to be discussing the same political subject. But they are saying different things. I mean those symbols and gestures by which Jimmy Carter is seeking to deflate the grandeur of government and to establish something approximating human life in the White House. People in Congress say the response in their districts has been a spectacular veritable volcano of approval every time another limousine bites the dust. On the other hand, there is Washington: dark mutterings about sham and phony savings and the manipulation of a gullible public and even risks and inefficiencies that may be the price of these gestures."¹⁸

An example was when Carter ordered that "Hail to the Chief" not be played when he entered the room. After a year, Rafshoon, with Rosalynn's blessing, instructed the Marine band to strike it up anyway, and Carter reluctantly accepted. Carter bucked tradition when he sold the *USS*

¹⁷ Karen 'De Witt. "'Cousin Cheap': Hugh Carter Cuts White House Perks: 'Cousin Cheap' and White House Perks." *The Washington Post*, May 17, 1977.

¹⁸ Greenfield, Meg. "The no-Frill Presidency." *The Washington Post*, Feb 23, 1977.

Sequoia, the 104-foot presidential yacht, docked on the Potomac. Every president back to Warren Harding had enjoyed the yacht or the Floating White House as it was called. Carter did not see the point of it and decided instead to set aside five seats for members of Congress on Air Force One, ten seats for state dinners, and three boxes at the Kennedy Center. Carter was shocked to learn that, like every president before him, he was required to pay for all food and drink unconnected to official functions. Therefore, he rarely served hard liquor at small dinner parties. Instead, they usually offered wine, beer, and aperitifs with vodka, gin, and Scotch reserved for special requests. Pepsi, the drink of Republican presidents, was replaced with Coke, with its connections to Atlanta. He did not like the price of public, tax-payer-funded events either. Carter was taken aback at the cost of floral arrangements, as they could reach \$50,000 for a state dinner. On one occasion, the White House florist Ronn Payne noted that a staff member was detained for picking daffodils in Rock Creek Park that they needed for the centerpieces. Carter also cut down on travel costs. He eliminated the staff cars, which led to cries from aides who did not want to drive themselves to work. The administration also declared that the most senior government officials could no longer fly first class on international flights. Carter was tight in his political life, but he also remained frugal in his personal life. Carter still wore suits he bought for less than \$100 from a friend and former Georgia state senator who specialized in making clothes for J.C. Penney and other department stores. Carter often purchased clothes from the Dollar General store in Atlanta. When Rosalynn wanted to purchase something nicer for him, she often clipped off the price so he wouldn't know exactly how much it cost. Carter was a budget cutter, and this haunted him throughout his presidency.¹⁹ As a President known for cutting costs, he would receive criticism for being budget-conscious. Critics would be conscious

¹⁹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 324-326.

of his decisions in the White House as he tried to conserve energy preservation by lowering the thermostats in governmental buildings and his position regulating government efficiency through cutting non-essential practices.

One of Carter's key domestic issues was energy, to which he called for a comprehensive plan to revolutionize every aspect of its price and use.²⁰ This decision took a toll on Carter's popularity, even to this day. However, he organized a meeting one month after the November election and called for a comprehensive energy policy within ninety days. Cold weather was a major concern for Carter's administration as it had historical consequences. With record-low temperatures leading to home heating oil shortages, widespread destruction of crops in the South, and scores of people freezing to death, something had to be done. Within four years and three major energy packages later, Carter had placed the nation on a course toward regaining its lost energy security and granted major incentives for greater conservation and market-based pricing of crude oil and natural gas to encourage greater domestic production. President Carter began the solar, wind, and alternative energy revolution and brought competition for the benefit of consumers to the delivery of electricity, which sparked the influence of future presidents. Turning Carter's vision into Congressional action was extremely difficult because the nation had created a crazy piece mill system of federal price controls on oil and gas, discouraging production and encouraging overconsumption. The system created artificially low prices, quotas, tax privileges, and subsidies that showered benefits on the oil and gas industry in parts of the country rich in fossil fuels while imposing costs on the rest of the nation. Energy politics are divided along regional lines because the United States was the only major producer and consumer of energy. The producing regions in the Southwest and West held vast amounts of

²⁰ Congressional Budget Office, *President Carter's Energy Proposals: A Perspective*, 95th Congress, 1977.

energy underground, and the Northeast and Midwest had few energy resources but a great appetite for energy to power their industries, homes, and cars. Politicians from producing states wanted higher prices and federal incentives to drive up profits, while consuming regions wanted lower prices for their consumers. Interest groups were on all sides of the energy pricing networks; however, environmental organizations urged tight control on the prices and profits of energy companies. The grassroots mobilization for environmental protection led to the first Earth Day in 1970, built on efforts to address the contamination of water, air, and land caused by industrialization and urbanization. During the early 20th century, reformers warned that unregulated economic development was destroying natural resources and causing public health crises in crowded cities, where raw sewage and industrial run-off filled the waterways, and smokestack pollution clouded the air that people breathed.²¹ Therefore, Carter proposed higher prices and new energy taxes and tried to construct a rational system whereby he took on the oil and gas industry on one side and the environmental groups on the other, to which neither side was happy. ²² Four years earlier, at the start of Carter's administration, Arab members of OPEC, angry about the United States sending weapons to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, launched an oil embargo against the West. The embargo led to many emergencies like a three-day-a-week driving in Great Britain, fifty-five mile per hour speed limits in the United States, and long lines at gas stations across the world. The embargo ended in 1974, but the "energy crisis" remained. Carter requested that Americans turn their thermostats down to sixty-five during the day and fifty-five at night. The *New York Times* noted that "President Carter called on

²¹ "I. Origins of the Environmental Movement," *Omeka RSS*, accessed May 6, 2024, https://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/environmentalism/exhibits/show/main_exhibit/origins.

²² Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 137-140.

‘all Americans’ tonight to turn down their thermostats at home ‘to 65 degrees in the daytime and lower at night’ to help cope with what Mr. Carter called an energy ‘crisis’ precipitated by this winter’s frigid temperatures.”²³ Tip O’Neill proposed the Emergency Natural Gas Act, which authorized the president to reallocate natural gas supplies between the states as needed.²⁴ Oil imports were up nearly 50 percent in four years, and the cost of these imports climbed an astonishing ninefold between 1972 and 1977. Domestic production, stricken with confused policymaking, went into steep decline. The *New York Times* noted, “But some said that customers did not object when the temperature was held to 78 degrees. Some also argued that the 65-degree limit in the winter was too low and might cause people to stay away.”²⁵ Two weeks after taking office, Carter signed the emergency bill. He scheduled himself for a televised address from the White House Library to announce a comprehensive energy policy within ninety days. It served as a “fireside chat” in the revival of Franklin Roosevelt’s nod to his fireside chats. Carter wore a beige cashmere cardigan to invoke the nostalgia of children’s TV host Mister Rogers, fresh and comforting. ²⁶ A *New York Times* editorial called Carter’s debut performance “masterful.” Carter confronted the issue and noted that it would take sacrifices by the American people and the government. Everyone had to work together. Carter did not stop there to advance his energy policies. On a Saturday afternoon in early March, in the Oval Office with Walter Cronkite of *CBS News*, he answered questions in an unprecedented two-hour-long radio

²³ Edward Cowan, “President Urges 65° as Top Heat in Homes to Ease Energy Crisis,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1977.

²⁴ Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Emergency Natural Gas Act, 95th Congress, 1977.

²⁵ Richard Halloran, “Carter Orders a 78 ° Cooling Limit For Public Buildings This Summer,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 1979.

²⁶ “Carter and the Economy: Energy Crisis,” *YouTube*, December 14, 2011, accessed May 6, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SFM999m5c0>.

program. More than twenty-five million Americans tuned in, and nine million called into the station. The *Washington Post* noted, “Our concern is more breaking down the isolation of the President than anything else,” said Barry Jagoda, Carter’s television consultant.”... The volume of calls that we receive is not as significant as the fact that millions of people will be able to hear those calls that do get into the Oval Office.”²⁷ This scene made *Saturday Night Live* history when Bill Murray impersonated Cronkite. Dan Ackroyd played Carter as a president who was so competent that he could help callers on everything from fixing a high-speed postal letter sorter to surviving a bad LSD trip.²⁸ After the radio address and the show, Carter’s approval ratings reached 75 percent, his all-time high.²⁹ In another prime-time address, Carter acknowledged the weather had become warmer, but he made a speech that went down in history.³⁰ “Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem unprecedented in our history. Except for preventing war, this is the greatest challenge that our country will face during our lifetimes. The energy crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly.”³¹ Columnist William Safire popularized a demeaning acronym for the “moral equivalent of war”: MEOW. However, even the early reviews of the speech were positive.³²

²⁷ “Ask President Carter’: A Two-Hour, Toll-Free Call-in,” *The Washington Post*.

²⁸ “Ask President Carter – SNL,” Accessed from Saturday Night Live., YouTubevideo, 5:07, May 6, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-68iTvhWNBO>.

²⁹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 299-302.

³⁰ “President Jimmy Carter - Address to the Nation on Energy,” Accessed From MCamericanpresident, YouTubevide., 4:35, May 7, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tPePpMxJaA>.

³¹ *Ibid*, 303.

³² *Ibid*, 303.

In 1976-1977, the winter was one of the most brutally cold on record, and to make matters worse, there was a severe shortage of natural gas in the Northeast and industrial Midwest. The poor and less fortunate in the area were hit the hardest due to poor insulation and heating. Governors were complaining. For example, the governor of Pennsylvania, Milton Shapp, stated that without some disaster relief, he would have to cut off natural gas to specific industries at the beginning of February. Carter immediately called a special cabinet meeting, declaring New York and Pennsylvania disaster areas. He sent legislation to Congress, which gave him emergency authority to order gas fed into interstate pipelines, and it was quickly enacted.³³ The states had gas, but President Carter continued to find resistance to his energy policy of cutting back on natural gas. The *New York Times* noted, "Part of the problem, especially in California, has been that gas is needed to meet environmental standards, but with the cost of alternatives presently two to five times higher than gas, price is certainly a consideration. At least until the projected shortfall is erased, critics maintain, industry changeovers should be made before gas service is cut off."³⁴

When Carter was governor of Georgia, he took on the Corps of Engineers, which planned to build the Sprewell Bluff Dam on the Flint River near his home in Plains, Georgia. The dam was supported by Jack Flint, a local congressman, and was officially justified by supposedly recreational benefits. However, Carter deemed it would have interfered with the state's longest remaining free-flowing river, the Flint. After listening to environmentalists and fishermen, Carter conducted his investigative tours by canoeing down the river twice and fishing the shoal for bass. The local chamber of commerce estimated that as many as two hundred construction jobs would

³³ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 147-148.

³⁴ Steven Rattner, "Gas Crisis Has Complicated Origins," *The New York Times*, January 30, 1977.

be created and more for services for the dam after it was built. Carter ultimately stopped the dam from being built. The *New York Times* noted, “Supporters of the water projects here argue that Mr. Carter stopped the \$133 million Sprewell Bluff Dam to win national support from environmentalists, and Senator Russell B. Long, Democrat of Louisiana, and other Washington figures see Mr. Carter’s current determination as a logical reward to environmentalists for helping in his Presidential campaign.”³⁵ During the Carter administration, he initiated what became known as the Water Wars. Many projects offered significant benefits to local communities by providing them with everything from electricity to flood control and recreation for families; however, the funding process for these projects had degenerated. Carter was determined to reassert strict criteria to judge water projects and put a lid on the federal pork barrel.³⁶

Carter had backed almost anything congressional Democrats favored as he experienced a favorable balance with Congress at the beginning of his administration. Carter, however, reprised his dam-the-dams policy from Georgia and announced that he would eliminate nineteen out of more than three hundred water projects from his proposed budget in various planning stages. He considered these dams to be of “doubtful necessity” and threatened to veto any public works bill containing them.³⁷ This announcement soured his relationship with Congress. Veteran senator Russell Long of Louisiana told Carter he had gone to “war with his own best soldiers.”³⁸ The merits of the projects Carter canceled were all dangerous as one violated a treaty with Canada,

³⁵ “Carter’s Opposition to Water Projects Linked to ’73 Veto of Georgia Dam.,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 1977.

³⁶ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 247-249.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 304.

³⁸ “The Administration: Water: A Billion Dollar Battleground,” *Time*, April 4, 1977.

another was scheduled to be built on an earthquake fault line, and many lined the pockets of a small number of wealthy landowners at the expense of taxpayers. Also, the environmental impact was often harmful. Carter's list of proposed water projects to disband was gathered so quickly that he even alienated many environmentalists. Freshman Senator Gary Hart of Colorado confided to the White House that there were six water projects in his home state, three of which were questionable, but Carter had killed the wrong three. Some legislators were not even notified by the White House. They were informed by the media of the cancellation. After weeks of recriminations, the old congressman attached all nineteen water projects to the president's larger economic package and dared him to veto it. In retrospect, Carter wishes he had.³⁹

The President's energy plan saw some success in 1977 with the passage of the National Energy Act on August 5, 1977.⁴⁰ Carter set the nation on a course with energy that the nation still benefits from to this day. The plan provided incentives for home insulation and the first tax credits for solar and wind equipment. It called for home inspections mandated for utilities to assess the cost and saving of energy conservation and federal energy efficiency standards for thirteen different kinds of appliances. It gave \$300 million to help pay for energy-conservation equipment in schools, hospitals, and government buildings. It called for one uniform national regulated market for national gas, and homeowners were shielded from the immediate impact of rising prices by making the industry absorb the disproportionate increase. A minimum national standard for electricity rate was established to reflect their actual costs, and it created a gas-guzzler tax on autos averaging less than thirteen miles per gallon and a Crude Oil Equalization Tax on domestically produced oil. The National Energy Act also raised its wellhead price to

³⁹ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 304-305.

⁴⁰ Energy, National Energy Act, 95th Congress, 1977.

world market levels, with the revenues rebated to taxpayers through lower income-tax withholdings. It strongly incentivized industries and utilities to shift to coal from natural gas or oil.⁴¹

With a national energy crisis on the frontline, Carter created a cabinet position through the Department of Energy. Dr James Schlesinger was the first secretary of the new cabinet position. The position was activated on October 1, 1977, as the twelfth cabinet-level department. The department had two main objectives: to establish defense responsibilities that included designing, constructing, and testing nuclear weapons dating back to the Manhattan Project and to design an amalgamation of energy-related programs scattered throughout the Federal government. With the energy crisis of the 1970s, the executive and legislative branches needed to coordinate Federal energy policies and programs better. There were also questions about the need to separate nuclear licensing and regulation functions from developing and producing nuclear power and weapons. In 1977, the establishment of the Department of Energy brought most Federal energy activities under one umbrella and provided the framework for a comprehensive and balanced national energy plan. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission maintained its regulatory duties in reactor safety and radiation protection precautions. The Department of Energy was responsible for long-term, high-risk research and development of energy technology. The department was also responsible for federal power marketing, energy conservation, the nuclear weapons program, energy regulatory programs, and a central energy data collection and analysis program.⁴²

⁴¹ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 179.

⁴² "A Brief History of the Department of Energy," *Energy.Gov*, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.energy.gov/lm/brief-history-department-energy>.

President Carter was one of the greatest presidential protectors of the environment. 1909, when Theodore Roosevelt left office, he protected 230 million acres of public land. When Carter left office in 1981, he had more than doubled that number of protected public land. Carter learned his love of the land from his father, James Carter Sr., a leader of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Carter also drew inspiration from his Christian faith. When he was outdoors, he stated he felt “closer to God” and developed an appreciation for the protection of the land. He addressed the issue of the environment at the stake of all political costs. He was not afraid to alienate Congress or the Army Corps of Engineers. He took on projects such as coal mine operators in the Surface Mining Act, which was twice vetoed by President Ford, to limit environmental degradation for strip mining.⁴³ The chemical industry passed the first broad-based toxic-waste pollution controls. The automobile and oil industry lobbied to strengthen the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts by implementing tough fuel-efficiency and emissions standards for cars and trucks.⁴⁴ In a system cap-and-trade, he substituted heavy-handed, top-down government regulation with a creative new, cost-effective way that gave the industry flexibility to meet new environmental standards. Every plant did not have to meet environmental standards if the entire company did so. If they did better than federal standards, they could then engage in free market trading of credits for the emissions they had saved with companies that failed to meet the standards. Carter also worked with Representative John LaFalce of Buffalo to sign a Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act to clean up dangerous wastes around the country and have the chemical industry pay a large share of the

⁴³ Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, 1977, 2021.

⁴⁴ “Clean Water Act (CWA),” *Clean Water Act (CWA)*, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.boem.gov/environment/environmental-assessment/clean-water-act-cwa>.

costs.⁴⁵ He was also the first president to put conservation of the environment on the global agenda with the Global 2000 Report.⁴⁶ The report highlighted global environmental trends in ten significant areas, such as world population growth, water resources, agriculture, fishing, and forests. The report stated that problems such as pollution, overpopulation, global warming, and other environmental issues posed a severe threat to the future of humanity. President Carter's administration urged international cooperation to solve these issues.⁴⁷

When Carter entered office, the economy was facing a dangerous challenge; it was a time of high unemployment, stagnant growth, and high inflation. Economists referred to it as a period of stagflation. Throughout the 1970s, inflation never fell below 5 percent, double the historical average. Experts from the field, such as Paul Samuelson and Alan Greenspan, believed the stagflation cycle began during President Johnson's "guns and butter" policy without raising taxes to pay for both. Carter struggled to balance lower unemployment with surging inflation throughout his administration. This divided the administration internally on how to attack the issue best. Carter realized that inflation was in great danger for the nation during his presidency, so during the first part of his presidency, he stimulated the economy with tax cuts. He also used other tools such as two anti-inflation czars, tight budgets, increasingly challenging wage and price guidelines, a labor-management advisory board, and deregulation. Carter appointed Paul Volcker as the head of the Federal Reserve, who used policies of tight money and high interest rates to combat the high inflation rates. Volcker's tactics squeezed inflation out of the economy with the cost of high unemployment. Some historians believed Volcker's actions may have cost

⁴⁵"Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA)," *Legal Information Institute*, n.d., accessed May 7, 2024, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/comprehensive_environmental_response_compensation_and_liability_act_\(cercla\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/comprehensive_environmental_response_compensation_and_liability_act_(cercla))

⁴⁶ Gerald O. Barney, *The Global 2000 Report to the President* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

⁴⁷ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 244-246.

Carter a second term in office. Early on, the Carter administration failed to recognize the seriousness of inflation and its inflationary psychology on society. The administration was willing to live with the high rates they inherited from the previous administration, mistakenly believing they could stimulate the economy to drive down unemployment without further spiking inflation. There was a perfect storm brewing that Carter had little control over, such as the second oil price shock of the 1970s. The oil price shock sparked by the Iranian Revolution, soaring world food prices, and productivity sank to an unprecedented low. All those factors boosted inflation from its high level of about 6 percent to double digits in four years. Many Americans felt the economy was out of control and their livelihoods were at stake. The *New York Times* noted, "That something must be done is correct. The question is whether what is being tried or is likely to be tried, will work, or whether we must, inevitably, prepare ourselves for the emergence of some kind of 20th-century American Napoleon, or, at least, for the shock of another Great Depression. Or, indeed, whether anything reasonably acceptable to the many conflicting interests in this country has any chance of working."⁴⁸ The international community felt those fears along with the global financial markets, which questioned whether the economic leadership of the free world was in sound hands. The withdrawal of confidence sent the dollar plunging. This level and force of inflation had not been seen in America since the Civil War. Nixon, a Republican, imposed wage and price controls while Ford, a Democrat, resorted to vetoing Democratic spending bills and a campaign of cheerleading conferences called Whip Inflation Now. Ford's administration switched focus from reducing unemployment to fighting inflation by citing the Republican mantra of balancing the budget. Neither Nixon nor Ford had the Federal Reserve chairman Arthur Burns to raise interest rates to fight inflation in fear that it

⁴⁸ Leonard Silk. "How Carter Can Stop Inflation: Inflation." *New York Times*, Jun 18, 1978.

would cause a recession. During Ford's administration, a recession came, and inflation averaged 9 percent by 1975. This, in turn, helped get Carter elected. Carter's administration had four years of growth and created more than 10 million new jobs. That was more than what was created under Nixon and Ford, almost twice the number created during Ronald Reagan. Carter's budget deficits were a fraction of Reagan's mammoth ones, and federal spending during the first four years of the Reagan administration averaged about 24 percent of gross domestic product compared with only 21 percent during the Carter administration.⁴⁹

A vital interest of Carter's was to improve education as it would also improve the unemployment issue in the United States. He had sought a seat in the Georgia Senate in 1962 primarily because of his concerns regarding the threats to the education system. He had served on the County Board of Education for seven years. He witnessed first-hand the willingness of some Georgia leaders to destroy the public schools rather than see them become racially integrated despite the court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. When Carter was elected president, he had ample opportunity to give students of all ages a better chance in school. With part of his non-defense budget, he could double the portion going to education. His administration emphasized the federal government's role in compensatory education by helping to remove inherent inequities among student opportunities that remained even after the best efforts of state and local authorities. In almost all states, the most effective schools were concentrated in communities where the property tax base was sufficient to finance better programs. The worst schools tended to be in areas where deprived families lived. Carter worked on extending and improving the Elementary and Secondary School Act in 1977 and 1978, strengthened local control of the schools, and cut out many onerous regulations and much of the

⁴⁹ Eizenstat and Albright, *President Carter*, 277-280.

paperwork that had been permitted to evolve over the years.⁵⁰ Carter believed that every academically qualified student should have the opportunity to attend college. He passed additional student-aid programs being phased in during the years he served. The administration increased financial support for education by 25 percent in constant dollars and tripled college student loan programs.

Education in Washington was treated as an afterthought, only discussed at the Cabinet level when it involved lawsuits concerning equal rights for black, Hispanic, handicapped, or female students. The education programs were scattered all over the federal bureaucracy, and there was no coherent policy to be considered or implemented. During his 1976 campaign, Carter endorsed the creation of a cabinet-level department to correct those problems. Opposed by various people who saw advantages in the existing situation, the department's formation was delayed until October 1979. President Carter created the Department of Education under the clear command of the first Secretary of Education, Shirley Hufstедler. She provided better service and a consistent policy, eliminating many legal disputes that had long plagued the system. All these benefits were combined with lower administrative costs and fewer employees.⁵¹ The mission of the Department of Education was to establish policies and administer and coordinate most federal assistance to education.

Along with the president, the Department of Education executed the policy set forth for the nation in implementing laws enacted by Congress. “The Department’s mission is to serve America’s students and promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness

⁵⁰ Education and Labor, Education Amendments, 95th Congress, 1978, HR Rep 95-1753.

⁵¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 79-81.

by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.”⁵² Carter considered the education of young people a sound investment for the future. It would provide a prosperous life for the people it served and the country. It would go back into the federal treasury through taxes paid by more productive Americans.

With the help of Rosalynn, Carter strived to appoint more women and have diversity throughout his administration. Carter initially only appointed two women to his cabinet: Patricia Roberts Harris, who was the secretary of housing and urban development, and Juanita Kreps, who was the secretary of commerce. Women and African Americans were represented in Carter’s sub-cabinet in historic numbers. 1977 President Carter nominated two women to serve in his cabinet: Juanita Kreps and Patricia Roberts Harris. They became the fourth and fifth women ever to serve as a U.S. cabinet secretary. During his administration, Carter appointed a third woman to his cabinet, Shirley Hufstедler. At the end of 1979, 22% of the 2,110 appointments made by President Carter had gone to women. Three out of the five women who had served as undersecretaries and 63% of all women ever to serve as assistant secretaries.⁵³ He imposed firm rules on his speech writers to avoid masculine words when describing women. Therefore, his speeches contained no references to “mankind” or “the common man.”⁵⁴

One of the permanent effects of Carter’s interest was the diversity of the federal judiciary. Carter moved the control of nominations for the federal district courts out of the hands of senators. He gave it to a newly created semi-independent commission that looked for high-

⁵² “An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education-- PG 1,” *Home*, May 14, 2018, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/what.html>.

⁵³ Center for the American Woman and Politics Eagleton Institute of Politics Rutgers, *Women Appointed to the Carter Administration*, 1983.

⁵⁴ Alter, *His Very Best*, 313.

quality appointments. Carter only had one directive to the commission: to undertake affirmative action. Carter told Coretta Scott King and Martin Luther King Sr. that he insisted that the commission name at least one black judge from each of the states of the Old Confederacy. This transformation took a while because the American Bar Association criteria for certifying nominees as “well qualified” was outdated. Attorney General Griffin Bell slow-walked some women and black candidates because they had not practiced law long enough or written enough law review articles until Carter got involved.

Twelve US Court of Appeals nominees were men’s and women’s groups, and Rosalynn began to pressure Carter that he was not diverse enough. Therefore, he pressured the commission to look harder for qualified women and minority candidates. With the Omnibus Judgeship Act of 1978, a breakthrough happened. It was designed to ease the intense workload of federal judges and expanded the bench by a third, adding 152 new federal judgeships.⁵⁵ Carter appointed 262 federal judges, far more than any president in four years. He named fifty-five blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities to the federal bench. As of January 1982, there were 670 judges on the federal bench; 46 were women, and President Carter had appointed forty-two.⁵⁶ One of the most famous was Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a brilliant feminist law professor at Columbia Law School. “People often ask me, ‘Well, did you always want to be a judge?’ My answer is that it just wasn’t in the realm of the possible until Jimmy Carter became president and was determined to draw on the talent of all the people, not just some of them.”⁵⁷ Carter was the first president in

⁵⁵ *USCOURTS*, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2017/12/19/conference%20announcement%20F2.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Center for the American Woman and Politics Eagleton Institute of Politics Rutgers, *Women Appointed to the Carter Administration*, 1983.

⁵⁷ Alter, *His Very Best*, 314.

American history to serve a full four-year term and not fill a single seat on the Supreme Court. It was thought that if a vacancy came up in his reign, he would have named Shirley Hufstедler, a widely admired judge from California. Through his diversity of the judiciary, the cases the judges served on preserved civil rights, protected the environment and established essential precedents that would help shape American laws.⁵⁸

Bert Lance was one of Jimmy Carter's closest friends, tennis partner, confidant, and most of his experienced political advisor. They did not talk every day as they had when Carter was governor of Georgia, but they were extremely close until Lance's habits as a banker placed a mark on Carter's presidency. Lance ran his Calhoun Bank like a piggy bank, offering below-market loans and overdraft privileges to friends, relatives, and other favorites. After the 1976 election, Lance was nominated to director of the OMB, and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency opened a brief investigation into his banking history. On Capitol Hill, Lance minimized the irregularities and misapplication of bank funds in loans to relatives and friends and counts of alleging false financial statements, which no one pursued. "Powell said he was 'confident' that no conflict of interest is involved and said reporters should be concerned with the hard facts of the loan rather than with 'superficialities.'"⁵⁹ Lance had an interview with a business magazine and popularized the term "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."⁶⁰ Lance received word that *Time* magazine was preparing an article detailing how he faced financial problems because of the reversals at the second bank he had recently controlled, the Atlanta-based

⁵⁸ Alter, *His Very Best*, 315.

⁵⁹ Helen Dewar *Washington Post*, Staff Writer. "Carter Confers on Cabinet Appointments: Sets Meetings Next Week on Foreign, Economic Policy." *The Washington Post*, Nov 27, 1976.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 340.

National Bank of Georgia.⁶¹ Lance told Carter he couldn't keep the promise to the Senate to sell his stock because it would ruin him financially, so he offered his resignation. Carter declined it and persuaded the Senate to give Lance an extension. Later, Lance's finance caught the attention of the Washington Press Corps *New York Times* columnist William Safire. Safire charged the OMB director with receiving a "sweetheart" loan of \$3.4 million from the First National Bank of Chicago on the terms that Lance was close to the president.⁶² The story ran for months and would bring him a Pulitzer Prize. John Heimann reopened the investigation on Lance, releasing a 394-page report that, at first glance, seemed to exonerate Lance. However, it didn't. Robert Lipshutz, the White House counsel, read the summary and said that Lance hadn't broken any laws. Still, he had failed to absorb the damning appendix detailing sweet deals offered to friends and family at the Calhoun bank, along with other questionable practices. The press criticized Lance, and he eventually faced his critics in the Senate by testifying for over twenty hours over two days. The testimony went well; even some columnists thought the scandal was overblown. However, Lance was soon advised that more hearings lay ahead and that resigning would be in his best interest. September 21, 1977, Lance resigned, and Carter lost his best friend; it marked a turning point for Carter as it seemed to throw him off balance.⁶³

There were critiques of Carter's foreign policy initiatives. "Melanson argued that Carter's decision-making style led to a 'public perception of incoherence' that 'complicated his efforts to garner broad support for his foreign policy.' Moreover, he found fault with Carter's emphasis on 'managerial competence and devotion to human rights' as a substitute for effective policy

⁶¹ "The Administration: The Sharpening Battle over Bert Lance," *Time*, August 1, 1977.

⁶² William Safire, "Carter's Broken Lance," *The New York Times*, July 21, 1977.

⁶³ Alter, *His Very Best* 339-343.

legitimation techniques.”⁶⁴ However, human rights were a hallmark of Carter’s foreign policy. Carter argued that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written by Canadian and French diplomats at the United Nations and popularized by Eleanor Roosevelt, was essential to the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution.⁶⁵ He believed the values the documents were rooted in were descended from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus teaches people how to treat one another. Carter had seen segregation in the Deep South and was already a Navy lieutenant who supported the United Nations when the Universal Declaration was issued. He also supported Harry S. Truman’s plan to desegregate the armed forces in 1948. Carter felt that God had created the United States in part “to set an example for the rest of the world” and that America was the “first nation to dedicate itself to basic moral and philosophical principles.”⁶⁶ Carter’s policy was an outgrowth of the country’s founding ideals and his eagerness to place them into practice. He reintroduced the phrase human rights in foreign policy debates, and it transformed the concept from a Cold War weapon into what Carter called “a beacon of light for all mankind.”⁶⁷ It grew an international movement, globalized the American civil rights struggle, and set a new moral benchmark for governments and civil society to assess leaders’ performance. The phrase human rights stuck in part because of Carter’s personal history in the South and his religious convictions. For the first time, an American president went beyond promoting American ideals to offering specific critiques of

⁶⁴ Andrew Z. Katz. “Public Opinion and the Contradictions of Jimmy Carter’s Foreign Policy,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30,4 (2000): 669.

⁶⁵ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *United Nations*, n.d., accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

⁶⁶ Alter, *His Very Best*, 356.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 356.

specific countries with particular penalties attached. Carter aimed to condition military and economic aid on the progress nations made toward ending extralegal killings, detention without trial, censorship, and other abuses. Carter also put pressure on both Communist and non-communist regimes.⁶⁸

The first test of Carter's human rights policy came on January 21, 1977, the day after Carter's inauguration. Andrei Sakharov, an esteemed Russian physicist who had won the Nobel Peace Prize two years earlier for his work as a human rights activist, wrote to Carter. Sakharov named political prisoners in the Soviet Union and asked Carter to improve human rights. The letter noted

I wrote, in my congratulatory telegram on the occasion of your election, of the deep respect which your position evokes in us. I have frequently written and said that the defense of fundamental human rights is not interference in the internal affairs of other countries, but is one of the most central elements in international affairs, inseparable from the basic problems of peace and progress. Today, having received your letter, the exceptional nature of which I clearly understand, I can only once again repeat this.⁶⁹

Two weeks later, Carter informed Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in a private meeting that he would hold the Soviets to the commitments to human rights made in the Helsinki Accords. Carter broke protocol and sent Sakharov a letter that he held up for photographers in Moscow so they could see Carter's signature from the bottom.⁷⁰ The letter stated, "Human rights is a central concern of my Administration. In my inaugural address, I stated: 'Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere.' You may rest assured that the American

⁶⁸ Alter, *His Very Best*, 356-357.

⁶⁹ Toon, "Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State," *Foreign Relations of the United States: Soviet Union 1977-1980*, vol. VI, Document 9 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2013).

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 357-358.

people and our government will continue our firm commitment to promote respect for human rights not only in our own country but also abroad.”⁷¹

In a commencement speech in May 1977 at the University of Notre Dame, Carter laid out a new foreign policy.⁷² He wanted to balance freedom with better relations with closed societies. Carter defined the pillars of his new foreign policy as stressing human rights, cooperation between democracies, arms control with the Soviet Union, Mideast peace, and nonproliferation. He struck a theme of confidence that the American system was morally and economically superior to Communism. Carter stated that human rights were not just compatible with national interests; they advanced them.⁷³

During his administration, Carter founded the State Department Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, which issued country reports tracking the behavior of abusive governments. Patricia “Patt” Derian was the assistant secretary for human rights who started activism with an unusual vision and determination to work for civil rights. Carter sometimes invited Derian to the Oval Office for a first-hand report. Before specific overseas trips, Carter offered instructions on what to ask for from the foreign heads.⁷⁴ The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor was created in 1977 to help advance individual liberty and democratic freedoms around the world. The founding documents of the United States and the Universal

⁷¹ Jimmy Carter, “Letter from President Carter to Professor Andrei Sakharov,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Soviet Union, 1977-1980*, vol. 6, Document 5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2013).

⁷² “Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-commencement-exercises-the-university-notre-dame#axzz1XkJgCgHM>.

⁷³ Alter, *His Very Best*, 360-361.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 362-363.

Declaration of Human Rights addressed the fundamental freedoms of individuals. The mission stated, “The United States supports the aspirations of those persons who long to live in freedom and under democratic governments as a means of combating terrorism and the spread of authoritarianism and advancing a free, peaceful, and prosperous world on behalf of the American people.”⁷⁵

The human rights policy was effective in the Western hemisphere, where the United States had much more power. Carter noted to the dictators that the old days of exporting their raw materials to America in exchange for a blind eye to their abuses of power were over. Brazil, South America’s largest country, had been under military rule since 1964 and abruptly canceled its long-standing military treaty with the United States. Brazil threatened to build a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in violation of the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, which aimed to prevent the spread of atomic weapons to Latin America.⁷⁶ Carter negotiated some trade concessions, which enhanced human rights and enforced a treaty that kept Latin America nuclear-free. Argentina’s military government, in 1976, launched a “dirty war” against suspected leftist terrorists secretly backed by Henry Kissinger. By the time Carter took office, an estimated fifteen thousand people had “disappeared.” Jacobo Timerman was imprisoned and tortured in 1977 when he published the disappearances. Timerman credited Derian with saving his life. The resources of American diplomats in Argentina continued to save hundreds more. An Argentinian jailer told one prisoner named Alejandro Deutsch, “You must have very good contacts because nobody leaves this place alive.”⁷⁷ In Chile, the number of disappearances during Carter’s time in office dropped from

⁷⁵ “About Us – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor - United States Department of State,” *U.S. Department of State*, December 1, 2020, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/about-us-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/>.

⁷⁶ Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear. Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, February 14, 1976.

⁷⁷ Alter, *His Very Best*, 363.

hundreds each year to a trickle. In Nicaragua, a Marxist insurgency, the Sandinistas, was on the threshold of victory in a long-running civil war. Carter cut military and economic aid to Anastasio Somoza, whose family had run the country as its fiefdom for over forty years. In 1979, Carter proposed to the Organization of American States that the dictator step down and agree to elections. Anastasio Somoza rejected this deal and tried to flee to Miami with much of the country's treasury in his luggage. Carter ordered that he be stopped at the border. Somoza resettled in Paraguay, where he was assassinated the following year by Sandinista-backed agents.⁷⁸

The worst human rights violation to occur in Asia during Carter's administration was the genocide in Cambodia. From 1975 to 1979, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge killed an estimated 1.7 million people, more than one-fifth of the population. Carter declared Cambodia the worst violator of human rights in the world in 1978. In late 1978, Communist Vietnam, backed by the Soviet Union, invaded Communist Cambodia, supported by China, and removed the murderous Khmer Rouge. Carter knew that if he accepted Vietnam's attack on its genocidal neighbor, it would validate aggression and complicate efforts to normalize relations with China. To bond with Beijing, he would have to criticize Hanoi. It was another seventeen years before relations with Vietnam were established, and with US-Soviet tensions growing, the United States voted in the United Nations to seat the remnants of Pol Pots' government in exile instead of the new Cambodian leaders who had been the puppets of Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Carter explained this as he was siding with China, Australia, and Western Europe against the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Cuba.⁷⁹ China and the U.S. have been normalizing relations since the Nixon

⁷⁸ Alter, *His Very Best*, 362-363.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 367-368.

administration. During Carter's administration, the United States declared its intention to abrogate the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Republic of China, initially signed in December 1954.⁸⁰ The treaty supported the Republic of China in its assertion of legitimacy as the sole government of mainland China. Critics called out Jimmy Carter for not getting involved in the human rights violations in Cambodia. "Major issues of more immediate importance to the United States also deflected attention from Southeast Asia: forging a new Panama Canal treaty, trying to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian problem, responding to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and dealing with the Iranian hostage crisis, for example, but in the final analysis, old-fashioned geopolitical considerations- in particular, the desire to oppose the perceived expansion of Soviet influence in Southeast Asia at the expense of America's new friend, China- won out over human rights in Carter's Cambodia policy."⁸¹

Rosalynn Carter, as an extension to President Carter, traveled to Thailand to investigate the conditions of refugee camps that dated back to 1975 when the Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia. Pol Pot, the leader, had systematically killed at least a million Cambodians while also intensifying a border dispute with Vietnam. Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1979, forcing Pol Pot out of power and installing their government. The Khmer Rouge fled to the western part of Cambodia while tens of thousands of Cambodians trekked into eastern Thailand. Rosalynn was briefed before her trip, just like she was before she went to Latin America, specifically on the causes of the refugee crisis. Rosalynn had learned that Thai Prime Minister Chamanand Kriangsak had agreed to admit all refugees to Thailand, a notion not entirely accepted in his

⁸⁰ Arthur Radford, "Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (Wilson)," *Foreign Relations of the United States: China and Japan, 1952-1954*, vol. XIV, Document 423 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985).

⁸¹ Kenton Clymer, "Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and Cambodia," *Diplomatic History* 27, 2 (2003): 246.

country. When she reached the Sakeo refugee camp, she saw shelters made of plastic bags, the smell of human feces, and thousands of people dying from illness and malnutrition. Relief agencies that had been sent could not cope with the number of people flooding into the camps. There were not enough resources. Rosalynn was touched at the camp; while she was there, she held a small baby when she first got there; when she left, she learned the baby had died.⁸² The *New York Times* ran an article noting, “‘Emotionally it’s overwhelming,’ Mrs. Carter said at the end of her 90-minute tour of the camp at Ban Kaeng, about 40 miles from the Cambodian border. ‘As a wife, as a mother, as a human being, it’s devastating.’”⁸³

Rosalynn also visited two other camps: the Ubon refugee camp, populated by Laotians who had been there for about three years, and the Lumpini Transit Center in Bangkok, where emigrants passed through before leaving the country. Rosalynn met the King of Thailand, Phumiphol Aduldet, who opposed Kriangsak’s decision to allow the refugees into his country. She tried to convince him to open additional refugee camps. The King, however, was more interested in getting rid of the Prime Minister than opening additional camps. Rosalynn prepared a report of what she had seen, making recommendations for the United States such as providing funds so the camps could purchase food and services they required, beginning an airlift to assist the refugees, getting the United Nations Human Rights Commission to build new facilities for refugees emigration, increasing the number of volunteers assigned to the relief effort, and appointed a coordinator for refugee affairs to oversee the relief program.⁸⁴ Rosalynn contacted

⁸² Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 82-83.

⁸³ Henry Kamm, “Mrs. Carter Visits Thai Camp: ‘It’s like Nothing I’ve Seen,’” *The New York Times*, November 10, 1979.

⁸⁴ Rosalynn Carter, “Report Prepared in the Office of the First Lady,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 1977-1980*, vol . XXII, Document 71 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2017).

the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim to appoint someone to coordinate the international relief effort. Jimmy called on the government, organizations, and countries to do more to help the Cambodian refugees. Rosalynn started a campaign for the efforts through speeches and television appeals and testified before the Council on Foreign Relations. Immediately, there was a response; the president was assured of bipartisan congressional support and called for \$69 million in aid for refugees, with an additional \$30 million if necessary. The yearly quota of refugees from Thailand increased. Representatives from more than forty American volunteer groups and the Notre Dame University president, Father Theodore Hesburgh, formed the National Cambodia Crisis Committee that sought to raise money from private sources.⁸⁵

Rosalynn played a crucial role in foreign policy as she became a prominent participant in Jimmy's foreign policy during her travels abroad. As First Lady, she either traveled with her husband or alone on goodwill missions; however, in Rosalynn's case, she discussed substantive policy matters in her missions, as shown on her trip to Latin America in 1977. She was one of the president's key advisors, listening to his concerns and suggesting how he might respond to particular situations. She gained criticism for her diplomatic missions from those who said that she was overstepping her boundaries and those who said that she was not going far enough.

Rosalynn's first primary mission was to Latin America in 1977. Jimmy wanted to emphasize his desire to strengthen interhemispheric ties. The White House clearly stated that it would not simply be a goodwill mission but one of substantive matters. The State Department experts in Latin America feared the First Lady would damage their work with Latin America. Latin American diplomats did not take so kindly, as one commented, "If we were not so used to insults from the United States, we would make more of the insult and gall of the United States

⁸⁵ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 83-85.

president sending his wife to talk with us.”⁸⁶ The trip continued as Rosalynn was scheduled to attend seven nations: Jamaica, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. All nations Rosalynn would be visiting had to be democracies, excluding aggressive, authoritarian regimes; the Carter administration sent a message that it would not deal with nations that violated human rights. Rosalynn went through twenty-six hours of briefings to prepare for her tour. Rosalynn began to sit in on the president’s daily foreign policy briefings by national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. She took extensive notes to review; if she was not reviewing those, she was studying Spanish or reading as much as she could on Latin America. She was advised to avoid discussing unsolvable U.S. tariffs on imports and instead focus on the president’s commitment to democracy and human rights.⁸⁷ Before her departure, President Carter said, "They have been well prepared for this trip. It’s a gesture of goodwill between our own country and those nations in Latin America who have been so close to us in years gone by, historically our friends and allies. We share with them a common purpose, a common culture, common interests, problems, and opportunities. In addition to this expression of friendship, this small group will be discussing subjects that are of interest to the leaders of those countries, and Rosalynn will be making daily reports back to me and the Secretary of State about the results of the conversations with the leaders of those countries.”⁸⁸

Jamaica was Rosalynn's first stop on the Latin America tour. She held talks with Prime Minister Norman Manley. Jamaica had a severe financial crisis, which was spearheaded by a

⁸⁶ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 65.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 62-64.

⁸⁸ “Rosalynn Carter’s Trip to the Caribbean and Latin America Remarks of the President and Mrs. Carter Prior to Her Departure from Brunswick, Georgia,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/rosalynn-carters-trip-the-caribbean-and-latin-america-remarks-the-president-and-mrs-carter>.

decline in both tourism and the sale of bauxite. The country was also outsourcing for oil as they did not have an available reserve of their own. The result was a \$350 million trade deficit in 1976 and a 25 percent unemployment rate. Manley sought U.S. aid; however, he had a favorable view of Cuba's Fidel Castro, which led to dealings with the U.S. being handled with suspicion. Manley calculated that his nation needed \$250 million a year in economic aid, and in five years, the U.S. had provided a total of \$41 million. He stated he was close with Cuba because the United States did not provide him with sufficient funds. Manley ultimately defended Castro in the end, with some of Castro's policies in South Africa urging the United States to normalize relations with Cuba. The *Washington Post* noted, "Any effort to increase U.S. aid to Jamaica may encounter difficulty in Congress where some members have accused Manley of Communistic leanings because of his socialism and his frank admiration of Cuba's Fidel Castro. Manley had strained relations with the Ford administration, which he accused of trying to undermine his leadership."⁸⁹ Rosalynn noted that Cuba's actions in human rights violations prevented normalization from taking place. Despite their disagreements, the Jamaican Prime Minister was impressed with Rosalynn. He viewed her as someone who spoke with authority and presented his concerns to the White House. She noted in her notes to her husband and the State Department that he wanted money from the U.S. and was willing to break away from Cuba.⁹⁰

Costa Rica was the next stop on the Latin American tour, where she met President Daniel Oduber. Oduber stressed his nation's economic problems. Even though they provided more beef, bananas, and coffee to the United States than any other Latin American country, the White

⁸⁹ Susanna McBee, "Mrs. Carter in Jamaica: Latin Tour Begins Rosalynn Carter Begins Latin Tour." *The Washington Post*, May 31, 1977.

⁹⁰ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 64-66.

House had placed restrictions on Costa Rica imports, giving countries such as New Zealand and Australia “preferential treatment.” Rosalynn was told that a coffee price decline could hurt the Costa Rican economy. Oduber was an outright critique of Jimmy’s human rights policy, stating that the White House should focus on rewarding those nations that upheld the rights of their people rather than chastising those who did not. He offered a solution to this problem by providing trade agreements and economic aid to those who agreed to the human rights policies.⁹¹

Ecuador was the next stop of the Latin American tour, where 200 student demonstrators threw rocks, tires, and dirt at police, shouting, “Rosalynn Carter, go home!” and “Yankees want to reinforce their imperialism.”⁹² A military junta-led Ecuador and Rosalynn met with their military leadership to express America’s support for the regime’s promise to return to democracy and apologize for the Ford administration’s withdrawal of preferential trade benefits. However, a situation arose in Ecuador concerning Kfir fighter jet sales and the United States, as Peru, Ecuador’s neighbor, was building up its military with the help of the Soviets. The Ecuadorians viewed the halt of sales of the Kfir fighter jets by the Americans as endangering their country and interfering in international affairs. Rosalynn listened to their plight and vowed to lend their concerns to her husband and Peruvian leadership, and she praised the junta’s plan to move its nation towards democracy.⁹³

Peru was the next stop of the Latin American tour, where Rosalynn met the military leader of the nation, General Francisco Morales Bermudez. Rosalynn raised the administration’s concerns about human rights and the prevention of war and Ecuador’s anxiety over Peru’s

⁹¹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 67.

⁹² *Ibid*, 68.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 68-69.

military buildup. Morales Bermudez had not anticipated a discussion of serious issues. He then defended his nation's position on human rights, pointed to past troubles with Chile and Colombia to justify his arms buildup, and contended that the war with Ecuador had been the result of aggression on Quito's part. In a letter that President Carter noted to Peruvian President Morales Bermudez, Carter noted:

I was especially glad to hear Rosalynn's report of her conversations with you about human rights. We agree on the importance of this subject, and on the fact that it has two aspects- civil rights and economic rights. I look forward with great pleasure to your government's ratifying the American Convention on Human Rights. Rosalynn has shown me a copy of the Plan Tupac Amaru, which you generously gave her. Your proposals for expanding the participation of your people in the political and economic life of your country are very encouraging.⁹⁴

As the meeting progressed, they talked about the drug trade and prisoners being held in Peruvian jails. Morales Bermudez stated that his government was trying to do more for the illicit drug trade.⁹⁵

Brazil was Rosalynn's next stop on the Latin America tour, and it proved to be the most difficult due to Jimmy's stance on human rights. The State Department had issued a report condemning the state on human rights in Brazil, and the government of President Ernesto Geisel rejected a plan to purchase \$50 million in military wares from the United States and canceled a military aid agreement with Washington. Rosalynn met President Geisel, where she requested that he sign the Treaty of Tlatelolco that vowed to keep their Latin American countries free of nuclear weapons. Geisel said that he would not sign until their neighbor Argentina ratified it. They also talked about human rights, where he refused to endorse the American Convention on

⁹⁴ Jimmy Carter, "Letter from President Carter to Peruvian President Morales Bermudez," *Foreign Relations of the United States: South America and Latin America, 1977-1980*, vol. XXIV, Document 303 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2018).

⁹⁵ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 69.

Human Rights, stating that it might allow other countries in Latin America to interfere in his country's policies. Though her meeting with Brazil's president was heated, ultimately, they agreed to disagree.⁹⁶

Colombia was next on Rosalynn's Latin America tour, where her talks led her to discuss the drug trade. Colombia supplied most of the marijuana and cocaine that came into the United States. Through intelligence networks, the U.S. had information that connected high-level officials in the Colombian government to the drug trade. Rosalynn pointed out to President Lopez that the corrupting influence of the drug trade was having an impact on the Colombian government and the United States government, and there was a need for the two countries to work together. Lopez replied that this was an issue that needed to have been addressed years earlier. She decided that this issue was above her head and dropped it. Rosalynn discussed the issues of sixty Americans incarcerated in Colombia on drug charges. Lopez noted that the Colombian legal system worked quickly to satisfy those pending cases. President Carter wrote a letter to Colombian President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, noting.

I know that Rosalynn conveyed to you my great interest in improving our joint efforts to interdict the drug traffic, particularly because of the corrosive influence that drug-related corruption is having on our societies. I would appreciate receiving any information you have regarding the involvement of United States citizens in drug traffic, and I would like to share with you some information that has come to my attention indicating that several high officials in the Colombian Government, and several important political figures, may be benefitting directly or indirectly from the illicit drug traffic. I would be glad to have a complete briefing provided for your information, if you wish, at your convenience.⁹⁷

Lopez did praise the U.S. for its decision to ease restrictions on Colombian imports.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 70-71.

⁹⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Letter from President Carter to Colombian President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen," *Foreign Relations of the United States: South American and Latin America Region, 1977-1980*, vol. XXIV, Document 241 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2018).

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 72-73.

The last stop of the Latin American tour was Venezuela, which was seen as an informal stop intended to set the stage for Jimmy's visit in a few weeks. President Andres Perez supported Carter; however, he did protest the decision to withdraw preferential trade benefits from his nation because of the 1973 OPEC oil embargo. Perez noted that Venezuela had increased its petroleum shipments to the United States during the embargo. Rosalynn promised to bring the matter to her husband. ⁹⁹

The Latin American tour was seen as successful. White House pollster Pat Caddell found that 70 percent of Americans rated her trip as excellent to very good. Not only did she improve goodwill, but she also made lasting, effective changes. The administration decided to provide Colombia with \$4 million in aid, including three helicopters to help with drug locations. An aid package for Jamaica included a total of \$63 million, although this was part of a more extensive program to develop the Caribbean's economy. President Carter stated, "We're glad to have her home with the renewed knowledge and commitment that our friends in Central and South America are very dear to us. And I believe that the problems that did exist between ourselves and a few of the countries that she visited have, to a great degree, been resolved, and the agenda that she has laid out in close consultation with leaders of those nations is already being addressed."¹⁰⁰ However, not everyone viewed the trip as successful. There was clear domestic and international opposition to the idea of sending Rosalynn abroad to talk to foreign leaders. ¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 73.

¹⁰⁰ "Rosalynn Carter's Trip to the Caribbean and Latin America Remarks of the President and Mrs. Carter on Her Return.," *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/rosalynn-carters-trip-the-caribbean-and-latin-america-remarks-the-president-and-mrs-0>.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 74-75.

Another foreign policy venture Carter took on was his determination to return the Panama Canal to Panama. The Panama Canal opened in 1914, and it transformed global commerce by linking the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific in Central America. The canal cut over eight thousand miles off the old voyage around Cape Horn. President Theodore Roosevelt ensured that the United States dug the fifty-mile canal after the French efforts failed amid tens of thousands of deaths from malaria and yellow fever. Roosevelt backed Panamanian independence from Colombia in exchange for a long-term lease to build and manage it. Most Americans assumed the Canal Zone was American territory for seventy-five years, although Panama never formally relinquished sovereignty. However, the Panamanian government had no say in what happened inside the Canal Zone.

In 1964, Panama broke diplomatic relations with Washington after President Johnson sent US troops to quell three days of unrest that left twenty Panamanians and four American soldiers dead. Johnson agreed to begin renegotiating a treaty to restore diplomatic ties, but the deal's outlines were met with fierce opposition by both countries. Nixon and Ford launched fresh talks with the Panamanian leader General Omar Torrijos, but neither had the political will to push them to completion. During his campaign, Jimmy declared his unwillingness to return to the canal, but he changed his mind after the election. He proclaimed that giving the canal back to Panama was morally correct. After Carter was elected, Rosalynn and other vital advisors told Carter to wait on the treaty till his second term as they felt it was a political suicide mission. Carter rejected their counsel. However, most Americans and senators who had to ratify the treaty believed the canal was U.S. property. Rosalynn encouraged her husband to delay the Panama Canal agreement until his second term, but he disagreed. "If securing a second term was more

important to me than doing what needs to be done, then I'd wait."¹⁰² However, Carter said he might have waited later if he had known the brutal opposition. Carter placed Sol Linowitz, an experienced diplomat and former CEO of Xerox Corporation, and former ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to mediate the treaty talks. Linowitz broke the stalemate of the treaty talks by negotiating two treaties instead of one. He thought that the approval of the handover would not be threatened by the question of what would happen in a crisis. One treaty specified joint operation of the canal until the turn of the century, at which point the United States would give Panama total control. The second treaty was vaguely worded as a "neutrality treaty" that tried to assure Panama that while the canal would always remain open and neutral, the United States had no explicit right to intervene militarily.

Opposition began to swell in the United States, where polls consistently showed that only about a third of Americans believed the canal should be turned over to Panama. Carter hosted Torrijos and seventeen other Latin American heads of state at the White House on September 7 for a televised signing ceremony and state dinner. The President used the event to meet individually with visiting right-wing dictators and press them to show their appreciation of the treaty by improving their records on human rights. President Ford showed up, which lent a bipartisan feel to the event and began a thirty-year friendship and cooperation between the old rivals. Backstage at the signing ceremony, Torrijos broke down in tears as he thanked Carter for ending generations of frustration and despair. In early 1978, Carter returned to his prime-time fireside chats, arguing that Panama would no more likely close the canal than the United States would close the interstate highway system. The State Department sponsored more than 500

¹⁰² Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 77.

information sessions around the country. However, the most effective lobbying came from Carter himself. He hosted more than a dozen intimate personal briefings.

When the Senate convened, Carter was still nineteen votes short of ratification. The most surprising supporter of the treaties outside the Senate was the Oscar-winning actor John Wayne. He was a conservative Republican whose first wife was a Panamanian, and his next two were also Latinas. He and Torrijos were fishing buddies. Wayne contacted every senator about the treaty and why it was necessary. On March 16, 1978, the neutrality treaty was approved by a vote of 68 to 32. By the same vote, 68 to 32, the Senate voted to turn the Panama Canal over to Panama. Giving the Panama Canal over proved one of the wisest decisions made for democracy in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁰³ “In particular, Carter’s policies suggested a limited retrenchment from overextended positions abroad as a means of redressing the growing gap between U.S. resources and commitments. The Panama Canal treaties constituted a part of this strategy, which also included constraints on military spending and arms sales, greater allied burden-sharing, a resistance to the use of military force in peripheral conflicts, the accommodation of rivals, including the Soviet Union and China, and the use of preventive diplomacy. Working from very different assumptions, many of Carter’s critics denied that America’s relative material resources had declined; they continued to view virtually all U.S. commitments abroad as vital, and attributed declining American influence to a loss of will.”¹⁰⁴

Four times between 1948 and 1973, neighboring Arab states launched wars aimed at destroying Israel. In each of those wars, the only capable Arab military force was the Egyptian

¹⁰³ Alter, *His Very Best*, 372-385.

¹⁰⁴ David Skidmore, “Foreign Policy Interest Groups and Presidential Power: Jimmy Carter and the Battle over Ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties,” *Presidential Quarterly* 23, 3 (1993): 480.

army. Carter, in 1979, secured peace between Israel and Egypt, which has led to neither country creating war on the other in all the decades since. The Camp David Accords saved tens of thousands of Egyptian and Israeli lives and have reduced the odds of general war in the Middle East.¹⁰⁵ Carter did fall short of brokering a comprehensive regional settlement that produced a homeland for the Palestinians. Still, his handiwork has remained intact, making it the most important and durable peace treaty anywhere in the world since the end of World War II. The Middle East had been engulfed in war for decades. In 1967, the “Six Day War” occurred, where Israel shocked the world when it used lightning-fast military strikes to seize the Sinai Peninsula, along with the Gaza Strip, from Egypt. They also took the Golan Heights from Syria and the West Bank, which was home to thousands of Palestinians from Jordan. Six years later, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat launched a surprise attack on the holiest of days for the Jews. The 1973 Yom Kippur War ended with emergency US airlifts of arms to Israel and a superpower standoff. President Nixon ordered the Pentagon to go on a higher state of nuclear alert. The Arab states banded together to create OPEC, which led to energy shortages and inflation in the United States. By 1976, tensions were rising. Egypt expelled its 19,000 Russian advisors, still participating in a total boycott of Israel that extended to any direct communications and still prevented Israeli ships from passing through the Suez Canal. By 1978, the Palestinians were living as refugees in the West Bank and on the Gaza Strip by the hundreds of thousands. Carter knew that he was at a crossroads. He knew he had a choice between abandoning peace efforts and getting much more involved.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ “Camp David Accords,” September 17, 1978, *The Avalon Project*. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/campdav.asp and May 7, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Alter, *His Very Best*, 388-391.

Rosalynn and Carter discussed peace negotiations, “Are you willing to be the scapegoat?” Rosalynn stated. Carter replied, “What else is new?” Mondale also stated: “They get over here, and this blows up in your face, it could destroy your presidency.”¹⁰⁷ Carter decided to bring Menachem Begin, the prime minister of Israel, and Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president, to Camp David in the fall. Neither wanted to be seen as sabotaging peace prospects, so they accepted. They had different expectations. Begin saw a chance to neutralize the Egyptian army, which remained a threat to Israel. Sadat hoped to vindicate his bold trip to Jerusalem and make the United States his permanent ally. When the announcement came out of the Camp David trip, Carter received warnings from his advisers. None could see a pathway to success. Carter insisted that the only chance for success at Camp David was to be leak-proof secrecy. He barred reporters and photographers and instructed that no one invited should be in contact with the media for the duration of the summit. The original plan called for three days at Camp David, six at the most. They knew that the atmosphere would be tense. Several attendees, including Sadat and Weizman, had ordered attacks that killed the loved ones of those sleeping in cabins only a few yards away. Carter knew that Sadat and Begin had more in common than either cared to admit. They were both devout militant men who had spent years on the lam or in prison. They were willing to bloody their hands to achieve their goals. Their common target was the British, who had occupied Egypt and Palestine for decades and who considered them terrorists.¹⁰⁸

On Monday, September 4, 1978, Carter traveled to Camp David to await the leader’s arrival. Mondale was left in charge of Washington as he traveled back and forth to Camp David, and Carter stayed there for the duration of the summit, which lasted over thirteen days. Carter

¹⁰⁷ Alter, *His Very Best*, 392.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 392-394.

was joined by Rosalynn and his daughter Amy. Begin and his wife Aliza arrived. Sadat arrived without family; his wife Jehan had to attend to an ill granddaughter. The three delegations totaled forty-four people, with another eighty in support staff and base personnel. No interpreters were needed because all negotiations were to be conducted in English.¹⁰⁹ Rosalynn got the talks off to a great start by recognizing the religious devotion of the three men. She suggested that they open the conference with a joint statement asking the world to pray for a successful result, to which Carter, Begin, and Sadat adopted the idea. The negotiations lasted for thirteen days, during which Rosalynn was not an active participant; however, she kept records of the meetings she attended, typing over 200 pages of notes. Jimmy confided in her about his daily progress, and she provided him with moral support. Rosalynn was at the White House attending to some business when she heard that the accords were ready to be signed. She immediately notified her social secretary, contacted the cabinet and the White House staff, and prepared for the signing while the press secretary informed the media. The Camp David Accords were a success of President Carter's administration; they sure had Rosalynn's backing and support throughout their development.¹¹⁰

When the negotiations were over, it was noted that not since John F. Kennedy spent thirteen days on the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962 had an American president devoted so much time to a single issue. Carter, flanked by Begin and Sadat, explained to the world that they were signing two agreements. One was between Israel and Egypt, and one spelled out how Israeli forces would withdraw from most of the West Bank and Gaza and negotiate directly with the Palestinians and Jordan as part of a five-year path to "full autonomy" for the Palestinians. Carter believed that his grit and the courage of Begin and Sadat were secondary: "We finally got

¹⁰⁹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 396.

¹¹⁰ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 79-80.

the agreement because we all shared faith in the same God- we all considered ourselves the sons of Abraham.”¹¹¹ Carter surged 11 points in the Gallup poll in late September to a 56 percent approval rating. However, it did not last due to the growing skepticism that the treaty between Israel and Egypt would last. Within hours of the agreement, Begin told supporters in the United States and Israel that he had given up too much. The Knesset quickly approved dismantling the Sinai settlements, which should have paved the way for the final treaty but did not. Therefore, six months after the historic achievement, Carter had to travel to the Middle East to put the whole thing back together again.¹¹²

Cold War historians have noted a resonance tone with Jimmy Carter’s foreign policy. John Lewis Gaddis, a noted Cold War historian of the time, wrote, “The time had come, he insisted, to move beyond belief ‘that Soviet expansion was almost inevitable but that it must be contained, “beyond” that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear,’ beyond the tendency ‘to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our values for theirs,’ beyond the “crisis of confidence” produced by Vietnam and ‘made even more grave by the covert pessimism of some of our leaders. ‘It is a new world,’ Carter argued, ‘but America should not fear it. It is a new world, and we should help shape it. It is a new world that calls for a new American foreign policy based on constant decency in its values and on optimism in our historical vision.’”¹¹³ John Lewis Gaddis talked about this concept of a “crisis of confidence” in his book *Strategies of Vietnam*. Walter LaFeber was a pioneer “revisionist historian” of the Cold

¹¹¹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 416.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 417.

¹¹³ *Strategies of Containment*, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/7.17%20Gaddis,%20Strategies%20of%20Containment,%20342-79.pdf>.

War who has transformed the field of the history of the 19th century US foreign policy. LaFeber was a Cornell University history professor and author who challenged conventional accounts of American exceptionalism by suggesting that United States foreign policy was also motivated by imperialism. He wrote a series of books to provide necessary historical correctives to contemporary political debates. He wrote several books concerning Jimmy Carter and the issue of the Panama Canal and Central America. In his book *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective*, LaFeber argued that an interdependent and turbulent relationship between Panama and the United States continued into the 1980s with the U.S. using General Manuel Antonio Noriega to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.¹¹⁴

During the 1960s, the United States learned the Soviet Union had embarked upon a massive Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) buildup designed to match the United States. In January 1967, President Lyndon Johnson announced the Soviet Union had begun constructing a limited Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) defense system around Moscow. The development of an ABM system could allow one side to launch a first strike and then prevent the other from retaliating by shooting down incoming missiles. Therefore, Johnson invited Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin to meet at Glassboro State College in New Jersey in 1967 at the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT).¹¹⁵ Nixon believed in SALT, and on November 17, 1969, the formal SALT talks began in Helsinki, Finland. The United States and the Soviet Union agreed in 1972 to limit the number of nuclear missiles in their arsenals. The ABM Treaty limited strategic missile defenses to 200 interceptors each, allowing each side to construct two missile defense sites. Since SALT I did not prevent each side from enlarging their forces through the

¹¹⁴ Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal the Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York: OUP USA, 1991).

¹¹⁵ Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT), US-USSR, May 26, 1972.

employment of Multiple Independently Targeted Re-Entry Vehicles (MIRVs) onto their ICBMs and SLBMs, SALT II initially focused on limiting and ultimately reducing the number of MIRVs. At the November 1974 Vladivostok Summit, Ford and Brezhnev agreed on the basic framework of the SALT II agreement.¹¹⁶ This included 2,400 limits on strategic nuclear delivery vehicles for each side, a 1,320 limit on MIRV systems, a ban on new land-based ICBM launchers, and limits on the deployment of new types of strategic offensive arms. On June 17, 1979, Carter and Brezhnev signed the SALT II Treaty in Vienna. SALT II limited the total of both nations' nuclear forces to 2,250 delivery vehicles and placed a variety of other restrictions on deployed strategic nuclear forces, including MIRVs. However, a coalition of Republicans and Democrats grew increasingly skeptical of the Soviet Union's crackdown on internal dissent and the verification process delineated in the Treaty. On December 25, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and on January 2, 1980, Carter asked the Senate not to consider SALT II for its advice and consent, and it was never ratified.¹¹⁷

The 1970s was a gut-wrenching time of poverty for mainland China. The period of the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 to Mao Tse-tung's death ten years later, was when the leader had killed or exiled to the countryside many of the educated elites and middle-class strivers, sending the per capita income below that of sub-Saharan Africa. There was little contact between the United States and China for twenty-two years after the Chinese Revolution: no trade, travel, or cultural exchanges. In 1971, Mao allowed the US Ping-Pong team to visit, followed by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and, the next year, President Nixon. When President Carter took office, he made the decision that he wanted to normalize relations

¹¹⁶ Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (Salt 2), US-USSR, November 1972.

¹¹⁷ *U.S. Department of State*, n.d., accessed March 15, 2024, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/salt>.

with China. Carter personally handled the final China negotiations. China's priority was to end the American military presence there altogether. The United States was willing to yield to the deployment of American forces on the island but refused Deng Xiaoping, the vice premier, a demand that it close the US embassy in Taipei and stop selling arms to Taiwan. Carter promised that only defensive weapons would be sold to Taiwan. Deng Xiaoping arrived in Washington on a state visit, and he and Carter signed dozens of agreements approving the first significant cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges. At public events, Deng asked for Amy to come forward and outstretched his hand at the level of his head to show they were the same height, which always got big laughs. Deng was entertained by the Harlem Globetrotters, John Denver, and the Joffrey Ballet. Everyone sang "Getting to Know You" from *The King and I* as Deng put his arm around American children. Carter nor Xiaoping gave rise to the birth of modern China, but the underappreciated partnership of the two leaders helped birth the global economy.¹¹⁸

President Carter made remarks at the welcoming ceremony of Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, stating, "We expect that normalization will help to move us together toward a world of diversity and peace. For too long, our two peoples were cut off from one another. Now we share the prospect of a fresh flow of commerce, ideas, and people, which will benefit both our countries."¹¹⁹

The Iranian Revolution was a powder keg for the last years of Carter's presidency. It rivaled the Russian and Chinese revolutions in their twentieth-century importance and shaped the landscape of the Middle East to this day. The Iranian Revolution led to the Iran-Iraq War, which

¹¹⁸ Alter, *His Very Best*, 418-426.

¹¹⁹ "Visit of Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping of the People's Republic of China Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony.," *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 7, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/visit-vice-premier-deng-xiaoping-the-peoples-republic-china-remarks-the-welcoming-ceremony>.

left 1.5 million dead, severe repression inside Iran which exported Shiite fundamentalism in ways that harmed human rights globally, created Iranian-backed terrorist organizations that destabilized Lebanon and killed hundreds in bombings, set off nuclear weapons programs that threatened world peace, and created dangerous twenty-first-century tensions with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Carter's reaction to the events in Iran was everything Carter was not: undisciplined, disorganized, and poorly informed. Through five US presidencies, the Shah of Iran made great strides in modernizing his country. He built good universities and gave rights to women. Iran had become America's ally in the region, a significant oil exporter, and a critical strategic bulwark against the neighboring Soviet Union. In 1964, a special report was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency that stated the reform in Iran's progress: "For over two years, the Shah has been trying to effect fundamental economic and political reforms in Iran, with the primary aim of building a broad popular base for his regime. The most dramatic changes are occurring in the land tenure system, as villages are taken from individual owners and distributed among the peasants."¹²⁰ However, at the same time, the shah had authorized his secret police, SAVAK, to hold more than two thousand political prisoners, infiltrate dissident groups, and torture critics of his corrupt regime in the name of fighting suspected Communists. In 1963, he faced a challenge from a fiery cleric named Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini, who had a brilliant command of the Koran and had the audiences transfixed. Khomeini, who often made his most important decisions while sitting in a trance-like state, gave the shah's embrace of blasphemous ideas like coeducation, high fashion, and Hollywood a name "Westoxication." The Shah exiled Khomeini to Turkey and later Iraq, where he was largely ignored for thirteen years. During his

¹²⁰ "Special Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency," *Foreign Relations of the United States: Iran, 1964-1968*, vol. XXII, Document 61 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1999).

exile, the ayatollah's son died mysteriously at the hands of the Iranian government. His hatred of the Shah grew more personal.¹²¹ Carter met the Shah at the White House and then, six weeks later, flew to the Middle East, where he made a stop in Iran. On New Year's Eve, he toasted the Shah at a reception in Tehran with words that would haunt him. "Iran, because of the great leadership of the shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world."¹²²

Within months, Iran had fallen into a cycle of street demonstrations and crackdowns. Twenty thousand demonstrators gathered in Tehran's Jaleh Square on September 8, 1978, to protest the imposition of martial law. Government troops opened fire, killing as many as two thousand people. On the *Iran Front Page*, they noted, "The events triggered protests that continued for another four months. A general strike in October shut down the petroleum industry that was essential to the administration's survival, 'sealing the Shah's fate.' Continuation of protests ultimately led to Shah leaving from Iran in January 1979, clearing the way for the Iranian Revolution, led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini."¹²³ On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini, after fourteen years in exile, boarded an Air France charter flight bound for Tehran with more than a hundred international journalists so that the plane would not be shot down. When he landed, he was met by huge crowds. Khomeini named Mehdi Bazargan, a scholar, his provisional revolutionary prime minister.

Bazargan assured the United States that thousands of Americans still in Iran would be safe during the revolution. On Sunday, February 11, 1979, commemorated later as the founding day of the Islamic Republic, a mob trapped Iranian officers and twenty-six senior American

¹²¹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 431-434.

¹²² *Ibid*, 434.

¹²³ "Iran's Black Friday: Massacre of Thousands in 1978," *Iran Front Page*, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://ifpnews.com/irans-black-friday-massacre-thousands-1978/>.

military personnel in a bunker beneath the American military compound. Khomeini arranged for the hostages to be released unharmed after a few hours. Three days later, on February 14, rampaging pro-Khomeini militants assaulted the US embassy itself in the so-called Valentine's Day attack. Marine guards repelled this first attack without exchanging fire. The ambassador worried that if American soldiers killed any Iranians, a bloodbath would ensue. The following day, four Iranian generals were executed on the roof of a high school. The *New York Times* wrote, "An embassy official said that top-secret radio equipment worth \$500,000 had been blown up by staff members as the attackers closed in on the embassy's communications center. The official said that employees also had set fire to secret files but that many classified documents had survived and been left unprotected in areas penetrated by the attackers."¹²⁴ The Shah gave interviews from exile, holding the US president personally responsible for his fate. Leaks out of the State Department suggested otherwise that Carter had sided for too long with the Shah. Carter and his team could not be held responsible for the Iranian revolution and its aftermath, but the depth of Iranian hatred blindsided them.¹²⁵

The "malaise speech" was odd, starting with the fact that Carter never used the word malaise in the address or any other. Malaise is the general term for feeling general discomfort, uneasiness, or lack of well-being. At the time, the American public faced an energy crisis that left them uncomfortable. It was deemed the most curious, confessional, intensely moral television address ever delivered by an American president. The year 1979 was rough. It opened with the Iranian revolution and closed with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, sky-high inflation, long lines at the gas pump, open warfare in the Democratic Party, and the seizure of the

¹²⁴ Nicholas Gage, "Armed Iranians Rush U.S. Embassy," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1979.

¹²⁵ Alter, *His Very Best*, 453-555.

American hostages in Tehran in between. The address the president delivered was three speeches in one. He held himself accountable for his shortcomings, wrestled with confidence, community, sacrifice, materialism, and moral obligation questions, and offered a more aggressive plan for confronting the energy crisis. On July 15, Carter addressed an expectant audience of a hundred million Americans in front of a curtain in the Oval Office in a thirty-minute speech entitled “A Crisis of Confidence.”¹²⁶ He started by noting that it was precisely three years since he had accepted his party’s nomination, and he realized his speeches and press conferences had become narrowed and focused on Washington. Critiques of this speech have noted that when Carter gave this speech, he and his presidency were in trouble despite the recent achievement of the Camp David Accords. Carter was dealing with Republican opposition, a divided Democratic Party, warring factions within his own administration, and congressional deadlock. Carter’s critics called out his lack of skills necessary to deal with a fractured Congress. “Inflexible and isolated, he was more given to grand schemes and moralistic pronouncements than to coordinated efforts to develop policy or skillful political maneuvering.”¹²⁷

Carter then noted that “a crisis of confidence” had struck at the soul of everyone. He then noted why Americans had lost confidence. He confronted the American people over materialism. He was honest, a precedent that no one has ever repeated. Carter went into a vivid description of the energy crisis and how to remedy it. His action plan sounded strong but produced mixed results in the following years. When the speech ended, Carter’s top aides erupted in cheers. The public reaction was enthusiastic. The president had held an adult conversation with the American

¹²⁶ Jimmy Carter, “Crisis of Confidence” (speech, Washington, DC, July 15, 1979), Public Broadcasting, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/carter-crisis/>.

¹²⁷ Daniel Horowitz, “Three Intellectuals and a President: Jimmy Carter, “Energy and the Crisis of Confidence,”” *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture*, (2004): 226.

voters. Carter's job approval ratings surged 11 points.¹²⁸ The *New York Times* noted, "Mr. Carter found some response to his insistence, Sunday night and again Monday, that 'the energy crisis is real,' a belief that he feels the public must accept before it can meet the problem. The percentage of respondents who believed the crisis was real rose to 35 from 26. But the number who did not believe this remained a majority, falling only to 53 percent from 66."¹²⁹ The Journalist Theodore White later summarized the reaction: "No president since Abraham Lincoln has spoken with such sincerity to the American people about matters of spirit."¹³⁰

The admission of the shah of Iran into the United States for medical treatment in October of 1979 led to the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran, an event that remained with Carter. Fifty-two hostages all returned safely, but their captivity stigmatized him forever. On October 22, a Gulfstream II jet carrying the Shah landed at a private air terminal at LaGuardia Airport. Amid secrecy, he was admitted to New York Hospital Center under the alias "David Newsom." When the news broke of the shah's entry to the United States spread to Iran, a million protestors filled the streets of Tehran.¹³¹ The *New York Times* ran an article in 1981 noting, "'I was told that he Shah was desperately ill, at the point of death,' he said quietly, gazing at the pine trees outside his home in Plains, Ga. 'I was told that New York was the only medical facility that was capable of possibly saving his life and reminded that the Iranian officials had promised to protect our people in Iran. When all the circumstances were described to me, I agreed.'"¹³²

¹²⁸ Alter, *His Very Best*, 467-470.

¹²⁹ Adam Clymer, "Speech Lifts Carter Rating to 37%; Public Agrees on Confidence Crisis," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1979.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 471.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 510-511.

¹³² "Why Carter Admitted the Shah," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1981.

The following day, a twenty-four-year-old civil engineering student, Mohsen Mirdamadi, and a dozen student representatives of radical Islamic groups from all four Tehran universities were gathered for this planning session. Mirdamadi persuaded the group already called the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line to take over the US embassy. On November 4, 1979, a Sunday morning, the students calmly breached the front gates and told the fifteen or so Iranian police officers to step aside. American diplomats alerted Washington and began destroying communications equipment and burning documents. The US Marines briefly repelled women students led by "Mary" with tear gas and threats to use their guns. However, after seeing that the women, who wore shirts with Khomeini's image, were prepared to die as martyrs, the embassy's chief of security ordered his men to stand down to avoid bloodshed. The captors blindfolded them, tied their hands behind their backs, and hustled them to a nearby building. Photographs were taken that defined the era. At first, the hostages numbered sixty-seven, but in mid-November, the ayatollah ordered fifteen women and black hostages to be released. For weeks, the hostages were not allowed to speak a single word, bathe, change clothes, or go outside. Some were beaten for minor infractions, awakened in the middle of the night, stripped to their underwear, forced to face mock firing squads, and tormented with games of Russian roulette.

Several of the captors had a love-hate relationship with the United States. They would beat the hostages, then say they hoped to get a visa for America when it was over. Carter knows that from the start, the presence of the hostages severely limited military options. So he looked at other actions such as ending oil purchases from Iran, banning pro-Khomeini demonstrations on federal property, deporting fifteen thousand pro-Khomeini students, and freezing \$12 billion in Iranian assets held in American banks. The *Washington Post* noted, "The order affects the bank

deposits and other property of the government of Iran, the Iranian national bank, and such government-controlled entities as the Iranian national bank and the Iranian national airline, Iran Air. (Miller said last night that Iran Air would be given a license to depart from the United States.) The freeze does not affect the private holdings of individual Iranians, including Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who is undergoing treatment for cancer in New York.”¹³³ The political reaction at home was more supportive. In November, Carter’s approval ratings jumped from 30 percent to 61 percent in the Gallup poll. After an impressive press conference devoted to the hostages, public approval for his handling of the crisis passed 75 percent in the same polls. ¹³⁴ On April 24, 1980, a team of 118 highly trained soldiers from Delta Force, dubbed Eagle Claw, was to land and free the hostages. The mission failed as three helicopters malfunctioned, and their mission was scrubbed.¹³⁵ Eight soldiers were killed in the process. After 444 days of the hostages being held, they were eventually freed as Carter was leaving office and Reagan was entering the White House. ¹³⁶

Rosalynn Carter was always near during the Iranian hostage crisis. Even though she was the main one on the campaign trail for Jimmy Carter during that time, she was still offering advice to him while Carter was in the White House dealing with the situation. In Rosalynn Carter’s memoir *First Lady From Plains*, she recalled a moment of recourse when the shah was brought into the US, and she had a lapse of “wishful” thinking.

¹³³ “The Freeze.” *The Washington Post*. November 14, 1979.

¹³⁴ Alter, *His Very Best*, 512-517.

¹³⁵ *Crisis in Iran: Operation Eagle Claw*, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://media.defense.gov/2012/Aug/23/2001330106/-1/-1/0/Eagleclaw.pdf>.

¹³⁶ “Jimmy Carter and the Iran Hostage Crisis,” *Bill of Rights Institute*, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/jimmy-carter-and-the-iran-hostage-crisis>.

I have to admit to some wishful thinking in the back of my mind that we send the shah back home, but that was never a serious consideration. It would be a cowardly thing to do, and I knew if we sent him back to Iran he would be killed. But I never stopped wishing we hadn't let him come into the country in the first place. I wished Jimmy had followed his first instincts. But when the shah became ill, it was the right thing to do, and I suppose we always have to do "the right thing."¹³⁷

Rosalynn worked to provide a clear defense toward those who criticized Jimmy Carter's work on the Iran embassy situation. When Jimmy Carter sent a clear message that all Iranian commerce would be interrupted if a hostage were injured or killed, days passed without any motion. Rosalynn became very impatient, so she started to ask to "Do something." He would then explain the unacceptable repercussions of any drastic action he might take. She knew he was doing everything possible to resolve the crisis, exploring every diplomatic channel and planning military ones as well. Rosalynn Carter visited with the hostage's families at the State Department. The experience was tearful, but Rosalynn Carter reminded the families that Jimmy Carter was still doing everything he could for their family members. The families were brave, as she denoted, as they were patient throughout the ordeal in Iran. The State Department stayed in touch with them daily and brought them all to Washington regularly. They had formed their organization, Family Liaison Action Group (FLAG), which arranged meetings with experts on terrorism and with former Vietnam POWS. It was founded by Penne Laingen, the wife of the chief of mission in Iran, Bruce Laingen, who was held in the Iranian Foreign Ministry. FLAG pushed the State Department to answer legal, medical, psychological, financial, and reparational issues. They opened up mail routes to the hostages, and it was Penne's idea for Americans to tie yellow ribbons around the trees in their yards. Mrs. Penne was big on symbols, and as a reporter asked what she would suggest rather than demonstrations and egg throws at the Iranian Embassy in Washington, she said, "Be constructive instead. Tie a yellow ribbon around an oak tree! The

¹³⁷ Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 334.

reporter asked, Have you done that? As a matter of fact, yes, as a family gesture.”¹³⁸ Rosalynn joined the movement and tied a yellow ribbon on a tree in the front yard of the White House as other Americans tied them on trees, car antennas, mailboxes, light posts, and front doors. Rosalynn Carter visited a mental health center and was presented with a quilt the students had made with a detailed green background and a giant brown tree with yellow ribbons tacked all over the tree. The yellow ribbon became a symbol of remembering, and when the hostages came home, a symbol of freedom. During that time, a candlelight vigil was held every Sunday evening at sundown across the street from the Iranian Embassy in Washington. A group gathered no matter the weather to pay their respect. Then, when Bruce Laingen wrote home to “ring out the bells,” when thirteen of the hostages were released, the bells continued to ring across the nation for the hostages still in captivity.¹³⁹

Throughout the hostage, affair rumbles moved throughout Washington D.C. about Jimmy Carter’s brother Billy and his attachment to the Libyan government. *The New York Times* ran a front-page story that detailed Billy’s involvement in Libya’s government. The article noted “Billy Carter’s expense-paid trip to Libya last September—the genesis of his escorting of ‘the Libyan group that toured the United States later also the beginning of a plan for a corporate association with the Government of Cot. Muammar el-Quaddafi. according to persons who went with President Carter’s brother to Tripoli.”¹⁴⁰ Billy had formally registered with the Justice Department as a foreign agent of the government of Libya. He disclosed he had been paid more

¹³⁸ Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 342.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 341-342.

¹⁴⁰ Nicholas, “Billy Carter Link to Libya Reported,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 1979.

than \$220,000 and acknowledged he took two all-expenses-paid trips to Libya in the autumn of 1978 and 1979.

Billy also accepted gifts from Libya, such as four gold bracelets, a \$2,000 saddle, a suit of clothes, and a ceremonial sword. Billy reported that his payments were for work on a “propaganda campaign” to promote Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi’s foreign policy objectives.¹⁴¹ The Justice Department of Libya considered filing civil charges against Billy for failing to register as a lobbyist under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. However, Billy eventually registered.¹⁴² Carter felt obligated to release a statement condemning his brother’s work with the Qaddafi: “I do not believe it is appropriate for a close relative of the president to undertake any assignment on behalf of a foreign government.”¹⁴³ Billy, only five when Carter left Plains for a career in the Navy, was flamboyant and had been drinking in the summer of 1980. He and Carter previously worked together; however, in the family peanut warehouse business over the years, they tended to disagree on just about everything in politics. In 1978, Billy’s association with Libya became noticeable when he led a highly publicized delegation of Georgian businessmen to Libya. Carter heard of the trip through his secretary Susan Clough when she told him Billy was going to Libya. In January of 1979, Billy hosted a delegation of Libyans visiting Atlanta. When Carter heard that his brother planned a second trip to Libya in August of 1979, he spoke directly to Billy and tried to persuade him to cancel the trip. However, Billy refused his advice. On July 23, 1980, the scandal hit when Zbig Brzezinski briefly used Billy as an intermediary to see if the Libyans could do anything to help get the hostages out of

¹⁴¹ Bird, *The Outlier*, 542.

¹⁴² Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA): A legal overview, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11439>.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 542.

Iran. Later, news broke that it had been Rosalynn's idea to use Billy. Rosalynn told Carter that she had talked with Billy, who thought he could help. On November 17, 1979, Billy dropped by the White House for lunch with Carter and Rosalynn.

Brzezinski and Billy discussed what message they might pass to the Libyans. Carter later noted that he decided to take the risk because his priority was to do whatever diplomatic gambits he could to get the hostages released. However, nothing came out of the Libyan backchannel. The Senate Judiciary Committee opened an investigation into what was called "Billygate." Carter announced that the White House would fully cooperate with any inquiries and waived any executive privilege. On August 4, Carter spent an hour being questioned about the case, which he thought went well. The story eventually died down from there.¹⁴⁴ The White House submitted a statement on the final report of the Subcommittee of the Senate of the Judiciary Committee, noting, "The Senate subcommittee today released its report on Billy Carter. It confirms the statements in the President's report of August 4 that there was no interference by the White House in the Department of Justice's investigation of Billy Carter under the Foreign Agents Registration Act and that Billy Carter had no influence or effect on any U.S. Government policy or actions concerning Libya. These conclusions were reached after an investigation extending over two months, in which several thousand documents were voluntarily produced by the White House and executive branch agencies, and testimony was taken from more than thirty witnesses. No wrongdoing was found by the subcommittee."¹⁴⁵ "Billygate," as it was named, ended, and Carter was left to salvage his remaining political capital.

¹⁴⁴ Bird, *The Outlier*, 542-544.

¹⁴⁵ "Billy Carter's Activities with the Libyan Government White House Statement on The Final Report of a Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee.," *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 8, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/billy-carters-activities-with-the-libyan-government-white-house-statement-the-final-report>.

Carter's presidency has often been regarded as one of the most terrible presidencies in history. However, historians are starting to review his accomplishments. Regarding domestic policies, he created new cabinet positions, created diversity in positions of power, dealt with problems his predecessors left him, and created a new and lasting impact that has stood the test of time. In the foreign arena, he has left lasting moral principles that are still in effect today through his human rights agenda. He also swept his masterful Camp David Accords, achieving lasting peace in the Middle East. Carter did not stop once he left office. He used his platform as President of the United States to achieve goals and ambitions further throughout his life, gaining achievements for the greater good of American political and societal life.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

President Jimmy Carter was slated against Ronald Reagan in the election of 1980. As the incumbent, Carter faced many issues as he defended his domestic and foreign agenda. The main issues that concerned voters were double-digit inflation, rising unemployment, the crisis in Iran, the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and Carter's unpopular stances on energy conservation. This also included doubts about Carter's competence and that of the people around him. Throughout his campaign, he detailed the communist threat abroad and the effects that "big government" had on the country's economy. Reagan did not spell out his remedies for the problems, except for calling for a massive cut in income taxes. Carter spent the campaign attempting to paint Reagan as an extremist who divided the nation and was quick to pull the trigger on international relations issues.

Just like in 1976, Rosalynn Carter campaigned for her husband in 1980. The campaign fell on her shoulders since Jimmy Carter decided to stay in Washington to monitor the hostage crisis. The First Lady ran an intense campaign, spent upwards to twelve hours each day traveling and gave speeches and interviews. When she flew, she used a DC-9 jet with two sections to carry the aircraft. In the front of the aircraft were two tables, chairs, and a row of aircraft seats where she, her press secretary Mary Hoyt, her assistant Madeline MacBean, and their staff worked. Behind the curtained partition was a typewriter and a copy machine, along with thirty other seats for reporters, Secret Service agents, and anyone along for the ride. Between September 1979 and October 1980, Rosalynn Carter spoke in more than 160 cities in nearly forty states to a diverse number of groups ranging from the elderly to factory workers. Between June and November 1980 alone, she raised \$1 million for her husband's campaign. She developed a standard address that usually began with an explanation of her husband's determination to stay in Washington.

She then discussed his achievements, including his promotion of human rights, the Camp David Accords, the Panama Canal treaties, efforts to reform both Social Security and welfare, and the creation of the Department of Education and Energy. Rosalynn Carter customized her speeches by emphasizing specific points that appealed to her audience. For example, before congregants at a church in Harlem, she focused on her husband's religious devotion, and to a group of senior citizens, she highlighted all the president had done to provide federal assistance to the elderly.¹ As inflation grew and the hostage crisis ensued, the nation questioned whether Carter would be suitable to be reelected for another four years. A usually level-headed Rosalynn expressed her frustration on a telephone call with her husband: "It's really rough. Everybody's beating up on you." Rather than listen, he interrupted her, saying, "Rosalynn, I don't want to hear any of this." Angrily, she replied, "You can just go to hell," and hung up the phone."² Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were feeling the pressures of the office. Dealing with the pressures of the campaign, Rosalynn was looking for affirmations from Jimmy; however, stressed by the pressures of the White House, Jimmy Carter could not reconcile with campaign matters. Pressures rose as do in all couples and tensions were released in a marital spat.

The first battle for Rosalynn Carter in the campaign of 1980 was the challenger from Democratic nominee Ted Kennedy and the farmers. Ted Kennedy, brother of former president John F. Kennedy, ran a campaign against incumbent president Jimmy Carter. The test of fate would come in Iowa, where Rosalynn Carter would face the farmers and Ted Kennedy. On January 4, 1980, as a response to Soviet military action in Afghanistan, President Carter canceled contracts for the sale of 17 million metric tons of U.S. corn, wheat, and soybeans to the Soviet

¹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 134-135.

² *Ibid*, 137.

Union. It was the first time that the United States had used its “food weapon” against the Soviet Union.³ Ted Kennedy knew he needed to make an impressive show in Iowa against the Carter machine. Kennedy made an all-out effort as much of his national organization moved into the state, with hundreds of people working telephone banks to get voters to the caucuses. He campaigned two or three days a week in the state himself. *The New Yorker* ran an article that denoted that one of Kennedy’s advisors had told the author that it would be possible that he would lose to Carter by two to one, which was a prediction that would turn out to be accurate.⁴ Rosalynn Carter knew the importance of beating Kennedy early in the primaries as they needed the public endorsement for Jimmy Carter’s policies, for a strong Democratic party. Rosalynn Carter went to Iowa and campaigned with the help of Mondale, Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland, and their children to help promise the farmers that her husband would make good on his promise to keep the price of grain developing new markets. It also helped that their son Jack ran a grain elevator. He went from elevator to elevator, listening to concerns and putting in a good word for his father. As Carter’s campaign efforts continued, the price of grain held, and on January 21, they held their breath for the returns from Iowa. Kennedy was defeated in ninety-nine out of a hundred counties.⁵ In the Carter camp, it was thought that Ted Kennedy would bow out of the race; however, he did not. Kennedy held on until the Democratic National Convention. He emboldened the Democratic party with a speech that left a last impression for generations and cemented a division in the Democratic party. Ted Kennedy embarked on the spirit of the party by stating:

³ Jeffrey G., “The Soviet Grain Embargo,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://www.heritage.org/trade/report/the-soviet-grain-embargo>.

⁴ Elizabeth Drew, “1980: Kennedy,” *The New Yorker*, January 28, 1980.

⁵ Carter, *First Lady of Plains*, 339-341.

And someday, long after this convention, long after the signs come down and the crowds stop cheering, and the bands stop playing, may it be said of our campaign that we kept the faith. May it be said of our Party in 1980 that we found our faith again. And may it be said of us, both in dark passages and in bright days, in the words of Tennyson that my brothers quoted and loved, and that have special meaning for me now: I am a part of all that I have met/ To [Tho] much is taken, much abides/That which we are, we are --/One equal temper of heroic hearts/Strong in will/To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.⁶

Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter worked simultaneously focusing on Carter's accomplishments and the threat that the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan would pose to the traditional democratic constituencies and world peace. Rosalynn Carter declared that her husband had passed an energy program, had done much to help the elderly and women, and was working hard to get the economy on its feet. Rosalynn Carter charged that Reagan opposed Medicare and would make Social Security voluntary, which endangered the welfare of the nation's elderly. She rejected the claims that Carter had weakened the U.S. military and pointed out that defense spending had increased every year Carter served as president. The Carter's charged Reagan as a "trigger-happy" individual whose policies might drag the country into a military conflict.⁷ Reagan used the platform of the Republican Party to advance domestic issues that lessened the federal government's social problems, reduced restrictions on businesses, and implemented tax cuts. In the foreign arena, he demonstrated a fierce opposition to the spread of communism and a strong distrust of the Soviet Union, which he labeled an "evil empire." Reagan also championed a strong military and supported the MX missile system and the Strategic Defense Initiative "Star Wars" program.⁸

⁶Michael E. Eidenmuller, *American rhetoric: Ted Kennedy - 1980 Democratic National Convention Concession Speech*.

⁷ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 139.

⁸ "Republican Party Platform of 1980," *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 9, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/republican-party-platform-1980>.

The two opponents did not hold a debate until late in the campaign trail. Negotiations about holding a debate had been ongoing throughout the entire campaign. Eventually, one was scheduled a week before the election.⁹ Unlike Carter, Reagan had debated during the primaries. Reagan's aides, however, were worried about how he would perform against the well-informed incumbent. However, due to a roguish Kennedy family retainer, Paul Corbin, who despised Carter, the Reagan camp had a cheat sheet. Corbin somehow had obtained a copy of the briefing books the Carter campaign used to prepare the president for the debate. This showed the Reagan team where Carter was likely to attack and with what evidence of Reagan's shortcomings. It was later noted that what was called "Debategate" unlikely changed the outcome of the debate, much less the election. However, it did suggest the Reagan campaign would break the rules to win. *The White House Watch* noted, "The Carter briefing materials alone did not make Reagan a success in the debate. Reagan's closing argument (written by Gergen) asking voters, 'Are you better off than you were four years ago?' was a powerful way to frame the election decision. Yet it seems clear that the briefing documents did provide Reagan with precise warning of what lines of attack Carter was likely to take, rendering him more confident and at ease. The Carterites were praying that Reagan, under pressure, would make a major gaffe, but of course, he didn't."¹⁰ Throughout his debate prep, Carter tried to conjure the threat to peace that electing Reagan

⁹ "Transcript of the Presidential Debate Between Carter and Reagan in Cleveland," *The New York Times*, October 1980.

¹⁰ Morton Kondracke. "White House Watch: Debategate." *The New Republic*, July 18, 25, 1983. Accessed from Central Intelligence Agency Reading Room. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85M00364R002204260006-3.pdf>. (Accessed May 9, 2024).

would pose for future generations in the same likeness as LBJ did against Barry Goldwater in 1964 in his famous “Daisy” ad.¹¹

Carter mentioned that he had recently talked with his thirteen-year-old daughter Amy about preventing nuclear war, which she thought was the most critical issue in the world. Carter’s advisors noted that it sounded peculiar to be consulting a child and warned him to stay away from that notion. However, during the debate in Cleveland, Carter brought the issue of consulting his daughter Amy about nuclear weaponry into the debate, which did not settle well. Admiring Democrats winced, and Republicans used Amy's reference to suggest that Carter was letting his daughter run the country. The *United Press International* noted in an article, “James Golden, debate professor at Ohio State University, said, ‘It’s that kind of statement that lends itself to ridicule. I think it was an unfortunate statement and one that he probably wishes he hadn’t made. It was probably the only unfortunate statement made during the night.’”¹² Carter won easily on substance points; however, Reagan won the expectations game just by showing up and not sounding like a trigger-happy, unfit man for office. Reagan was able to ease concerns about his suitability to be President. In the days after the debate, Carter lost 6 points in internal polls, with a larger share of voters and undecideds heading to Reagan.¹³

The end of the campaign of 1980 for Carter was held with a thirty-six-hour dash across the country, ending with a rally before thirty thousand supporters crammed into a Seattle airport hangar. Back aboard Air Force One, Carter was in good spirits after meeting with supporters, but

¹¹ “Presidential Ad: ‘Daisy’ from Lyndon B. Johnson (d) vs. Barry Goldwater (R) [1964-Fear],” Accessed from New-York Historical Society, *YouTubevideo*, 1:00, May 9, 2024., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRp_BUMeapg.

¹² “Amy Carter’s Concern about Nuclear Warfare and the Strategic... - UPI Archives,” UPI, October 30, 1980.

¹³ Alter, *His Very Best*, 590-592.

the final polls had shown Reagan ahead by 10 points. Carter's staff notified him of the poll numbers and explained how the hostage crisis had triggered pent-up frustration among voters about the administration. "A lot of working-class Democrats are going to wake up tomorrow and for the first time in their lives vote Republican," stated Pat Caddell a pollster who worked for the Carter administration.¹⁴

On Election Day, just as they had in 1976, Carter addressed the hometown crowd in Plains, Georgia, at the railroad depot, only this time he knew he had lost the election. He skipped anything sentimental in favor of one final argument for a national TV audience about how he had kept the peace and made tough, unpopular decisions. He thanked his neighbors for traveling around the country on his behalf. Then he flew to Washington, where he met his inner circle in the Oval Office. Carter admitted he had to spend too much time in the fall "trying to recruit back the Democratic constituency that should have been naturally supportive: Jews, Hispanics, blacks, the poor, labor, and so forth."¹⁵ It was only five-thirty Pacific Time when the White House called the Reagan home in Pacific Palisades. Nancy Reagan was reported to have answered the phone in the bath and handed the receiver to her husband as he emerged from the shower. As Reagan toweled off, Carter congratulated him on his election. The networks called the election by eight o'clock on the East Coast, and Carter did not want to wait until eleven when the last polls closed on the West Coast to concede. At around nine-thirty, surrounded on the stage at the Washington Sheraton Hotel by family and staff, he said, "I promised you four years ago that I would never lie to you, so I can't stand here tonight and say it doesn't hurt."¹⁶ *The Washington Post* noted, "The

¹⁴ Alter, *His Very Best*, 594.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 594.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 595.

president's appearance in the ballroom at 9:51 p.m. climaxed a physically and politically brutal 36 hours for him. He had left Washington on Monday morning for his final campaign blitz, knowing he was in trouble yet believing with his aides that he could still pull it out. But by the early morning hours of yesterday, before the polls had opened, he knew he had lost. Still, he may not have known, may not have dreamed, of the dimension of his defeat. And by early last night, he knew even that, and so he wanted to do what he had to do without delay."¹⁷

Reagan won the popular vote by nearly 10 points, 50.7 percent to 41.0 for Carter. He trampled Carter 489 to 49 in Electoral College votes and carried forty-four states. Carter prevailed only in Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. The GOP took twenty Senate seats, giving it control of the Upper Chamber in twenty-six years. Columnist Mary McGrory wrote, "There was no election. That was Mount St. Helens, pouring hot ash over the whole political landscape, burying a president and much of his party,"¹⁸ Carter lost his reelection bid in 1980 due to several factors. He had run his election platform in 1976 on a promise of reducing unemployment, curbing rampant inflation, and advancing human rights; however, throughout his term as President, he was dealt a hand that prevented him from fulfilling his promises. Throughout Carter's tenure as President, the economy got progressively worse. Inflation reached its peak during Carter's final year in office, and he failed to assemble a plan to fix the economy until late in the election cycle. The Iranian Hostage situation, where 52 American captives for 444 days with a disastrous covert rescue mission, humiliated the administration and the country on a global scale. Also, Carter faced an energy crisis in 1979. The Iranian Revolution contributed to an oil shortage that became the catalyst for inflation and

¹⁷ "A Concession with Grace and Class," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1980.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 595.

created panic in the United States. Carter tried the approach of speaking honestly and frankly with the American people through his revival of fireside chats. However, he was unable to calm those fears with solutions to the problems at hand.¹⁹

Carter's personal probity, religiosity, and good intentions by themselves were not tantamount to good governance. Unable to project a unifying vision or to point to sweeping programmatic achievements akin to FDR's New Deal, Harry Truman's Fair Deal, JFK's New Frontier, or LBJ's Great Society, and judged uninspiring and inept, Carter was rejected by the voters in no uncertain terms, capturing a mere 49 electoral votes to Reagan's 489. Four years of fiscal conservatism on the domestic front left the country nervously looking at double-digit inflation, an unemployment rate exceeding 7 percent, and interest rates at 20 percent. Eleven months of unremitting television coverage and criticism over the administration's failure to gain the release of fifty-two Americans held hostage in Iran in the weeks preceding the election drove the final nail into the coffin of Jimmy Carter's aspirations for a second term.²⁰

While Carter was still in office campaigning for the 1980 election, he interviewed with Dan Rather on *60 Minutes*.²¹ This interview showed the epitome of how badly Carter wanted to come off as a straight talker, yet the media was still conditioned in the Watergate mentality. It turned out to be a fiasco for the White House. From the start of the interview, Dan Rather went after the president for Billygate and broken promises of reducing inflation, slashing the number of agencies, and overhauling the tax system. Instead, he noted that Carter was a good man, yet the job was too big for him. He then stated that Carter had asked his White House staff to issue report cards grading their subordinates A through F, and he then asked Carter to grade himself. Carter had been notified by his staff that this question might arise and had been asked to avoid it. However, he answered the question. "Maybe a B or C plus on foreign policy." Carter was then

¹⁹"American Elections and Campaigns – the 1980s: The 'Reagan Revolution,'" *National Archives and Records Administration*, n.d., accessed July 31, 2024, <https://reagan.blogs.archives.gov/2022/12/05/american-elections-and-campaigns-the-1980s-the-reagan-revolution/>.

²⁰ Douglas Brinkley, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The "Hands on" Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President," *Diplomatic History* 20, 4 (1996): 506.

²¹ "Dan Rather: American Journalist," *Video - 1980 Carter Interview, Dan Rather*, accessed May 9, 2024, <https://danratherjournalist.org/interviewer/american-presidents/jimmy-carter/video-1980-carter-interview>.

asked about domestic, to which he replied, “Under the circumstances, I think about a B. The- The actual results, maybe a C.” Years later, Rather stated he was stunned that the president answered the questions honestly. When asked forty years after the *60 Minutes* interview how he would revise those grades Carter said, “They look okay to me.”²²

Although he was a lame-duck president, Carter did not stop enacting his mark on the presidency. The year 1980 proved to be a legislative triumph for Carter. Carter signed bills that dramatically expanded food stamp eligibility, ending extreme hunger in many places. He established special courts under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to oversee the intelligence community for the first time.²³ He also provided generous new aid to higher education that, within a few years, would help power the information economy. Carter signed the first and most important piece of mental health legislation ever enacted by Congress, the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980.²⁴ This resulted from Rosalynn’s four years of tireless and politically skillful work. Rosalynn’s comprehensive bill mandated that mental illness be put on par with other diseases in the eyes of the government. It fully funded transitional housing and community mental health centers, which was a massive shift from large mental institutions that were already emptying patients into the streets. One of the first things Reagan did was to gut the bill, stripping it of appropriations. The ideas she had championed were now permanently embedded within the new Department of Health and Human Services and at the state and local levels as they changed

²² Alter, *His Very Best*, 580.

²³ *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (Fisa): An Overview*, accessed May 9, 2024, https://www.fletc.gov/sites/default/files/imported_files/training/programs/legal-division/downloads-articles-and-faqs/research-by-subject/miscellaneous/ForeignIntelligenceSurveillanceAct.pdf.

²⁴ Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Mental Systems Act, 96th Congress, 1980, HR Rep. 96-977.

prevention, research, and services for the mentally ill. While funding still lagged, almost all of her bill's provisions were resurrected nearly thirty years later in the Affordable Care Act.²⁵

Carter also signed a landmark bill establishing the Superfund, which compelled chemical polluters to pay for the cleanup of hazardous waste dumps, called the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA).²⁶ This bill was prompted by the environmental disaster at Love Canal, located near a chemical plant that had dumped thousands of tons of chemicals over several decades, contaminating the ground. The residents were found to suffer abnormally high incidences of miscarriages, birth defects, and cancer. The federal government relocated some eight hundred families, reimbursing them for their lost homes, many of which had to be demolished. The legislation passed by Carter has led to the clean-up of hundreds of contaminated sites since Love Canal. It has unquestionably prevented thousands or even millions of severe health problems.²⁷

Regarding public lands, Carter passed significant legislation that increased his environmental record. Over his four years as president, he was responsible for thirty-nine new National Park Service designations, with particular emphasis on urban parks that could be accessed by millions. He finished work that he had begun as governor by federally protecting Atlanta's Chattahoochee River. Carter also designated the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles as a national recreational area, preventing development in what is now one of the largest urban national parks in the world. Maybe Carter's least-known major accomplishment is saving California's redwood forest. Theodore Roosevelt protected Muir Woods's new San Francisco,

²⁵ Alter, *His Very Best*, 596-597.

²⁶ EPA, n.d., accessed May 9, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/comprehensive-environmental-response-compensation-and-liability-act-cercla-and-federal>.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 597.

and Redwood National Park was established under Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968. However, clear-cutting on the park borders created terrible erosion that dammed up rivers and imperiled the two thousand-year-old redwoods and giant sequoias. Carter gained congressional approval for the expansion of Redwood National Park and the protection of an area often compared to the Grand Canyon. Carter stated in a statement on signing H.R. 3813 into law, “This act will permit more people to visit the magnificent groves along Redwood Creek that contain the world’s tallest trees and will ensure that those trees are adequately protected. The existing park will be nearly doubled in size with the addition of 48,000 acres of land. Some of the land to be acquired has been damaged by logging operations, and this bill will enable the Secretary of the Interior to restore it to as close to its natural state as possible.”²⁸ Carter’s greatest natural legacy, unmatched by any president before or since, was secured only seven weeks before he left office. The Alaska Land Bill protected 104 million acres (25 percent of the state), a landmass the size of California.²⁹ Carter doubled the size of the national park system, tripled wilderness areas, and preserved twenty-five free-flowing rivers.³⁰

Carter’s farewell address, written with the help of Rick Hertzberg, resonated in part for its evocation of values at risk.³¹ Carter stressed “the inner strength of our country unchanging value of our principles and ideals, the stability of our political system, the ingenuity and decency

²⁸ “Redwood National Park Expansion Bill Statement on Signing H.R. 3813 Into Law.,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/redwood-national-park-expansion-bill-statement-signing-hr-3813-into-law>.

²⁹ Interior and Insular Affairs, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, 96th Congress, 1980, HR Rep. 96-97, pt. 2.

³⁰ Alter, *His Very Best*. 597-598.

³¹ Carter, Jimmy, “Farewell Address to the Nation,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed May 9, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/farewell-address-the-nation-0>.

of our people.”³² He described the threat posed by special interests and the specter of nuclear war. Carter mainly focused on what made America exceptional: our values. At the farewell dinner just before the inaugural, Mondale and Carter toasted what they all accomplished. “we told the truth. We obeyed the law. We kept the peace.”³³

Carter was just a small-town man from Plains, Georgia. The only political service he had before being elected to President of the United States was being elected to the Georgia state legislature and a one-term governor. However, the character that was established in him through his life by his parents and his experiences shaped him into the man who helped bring the American people out of the political and social turmoil of the political corruptness of the Watergate era. His moral compass of always telling the truth through dignity and his faith in the human nature of the American values of hard work, patience, respect, and kindness guided him through to the hearts of the American people. He was seen as an average American citizen willing to roll up his sleeves and work for their common good, with the help of his wife Rosalynn, who was beside him professionally and privately. The couple created a union strengthened by a mutual understanding of trust and a willingness to make a difference in the world around them. Carter noted that throughout his presidency, he learned a lot about our country, including its strengths and weaknesses, aspirations and achievements, and the threats to realizing its inherent greatness. He paused occasionally to read the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which offered goals to which the Carter administration was committed. His two main objectives were to protect the nation’s security and interests peacefully and to enhance human rights domestically and abroad, which he felt were achieved

³² Alter, *His Very Best*, 601.

³³ *Ibid*, 602.

upon reflection. He faced some unanticipated challenges, such as the Iranian revolution, the taking of the hostages, the Iran-Iraq war, which caused the price of petroleum and worldwide inflation to skyrocket, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter decided to resolve the long-pending problems of allocating large areas of land in Alaska, concluded a Panama Canal treaty, normalized diplomatic relations with China, developed a comprehensive energy policy, promoted democracy in Latin America, deregulated significant industries, and brought peace between Israel and Egypt. All of these issues were controversial. Rosalynn Carter also advanced many projects such as mental illness, immunization, volunteerism, assistance for the elderly, and worked on the passage of the failed ERA. Carter did denote that a grave political mistake was in not being more attentive to the Democratic Party, both in being prepared for the 1980 election and in avoiding the schism between his supporters and those of Senator Ted Kennedy. Carter and Rosalynn Carter expanded their involvement in many people's lives domestically and internationally in their years in the White House. However, they used their time in the White House as a stepping stone for greater things to come once out of office.³⁴

When the Carters arrived in Plains after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, they were greeted by a crowd of three thousand Georgians lining Main Street.³⁵ The crowd lined the streets to greet the former president and first lady in a steady winter drizzle. Carter was racked with emotion as he thanked the crowd and spoke about the hostages. When he finished speaking, he asked for a moment of silence to honor the eight men who had died in the failed rescue mission. Historian Douglas Brinkley stated, “a country-western band launched into a dirge-like version of

³⁴ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 202-203.

³⁵ “President Jimmie Carter Return to Plains, Ga., 1981,” Accessed from YouTubevideo, 6:01, May 9, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX8egb_vfco.

‘Dixie,’ a song suppressed during Carter’s campaign and presidency because of its identification with the Confederacy.”³⁶ The Carters then enjoyed a slow polka to the tune. The crowd lingered over a potluck supper of casseroles while the Carters eventually walked several blocks to their home. That evening, the White House staff gifted Jimmy Carter with a homecoming gift: a collection of carpentry tools bought from Sears, Roebuck for his woodworking shop in the garage. The Carters had one last task to complete for their presidency before they could settle into life as average citizens: visiting the newly freed hostages in Germany.³⁷

The day after Carter left office, he boarded a plane bound for Rhein-Main Air Base in Frankfurt as he nervously prepared for his meeting with the former hostages. He studied photographs of each one and took notes on their backgrounds. He knew it would be an emotional moment for everyone involved. He wanted to be prepared for tough questions and perhaps even anger. In a *New York Times* article, Carter noted, “ ‘It’s hard to know how they feel,’ he said, ‘but they recognize that they are hostages no more, they are prisoners no more and they are coming back to this land we all love.’ ”³⁸ When he landed in Germany, he was briefed by a doctor who had seen the hostages and was warned that the hostages were traumatized by their rough treatment during 444 days of captivity. Carter walked into the small dining room where the former hostages were and greeted each former hostage, and he tried to say something personal about their family or service. Some of the hostages embraced him. Carter gave an off-the-cuff speech stating how proud he was of them as Americans and their heroism. He offered a candid and detailed account of his diplomatic efforts to obtain their release. Questions were asked about

³⁶ Bird, *The Outlier*, 602.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 602.

³⁸ Terence Smith, “A Weary Carter Returns to Plains,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 1981.

the failed rescue mission and why the Shah had been allowed into America, to which Carter did his best to answer. The visit was friendly, and photographs were taken. Carter was glad to see the hostage crisis over and a new future ahead.³⁹

When the Carters returned to Plains, they were in severe debt. When Jimmy Carter was elected president, their agricultural supply business and farms were flourishing, and he placed them in a blind trust. Carter did not permit his trustee to update him with annual reports. When Carter was preparing to leave the White House, he learned that because of inept management and three years of severe drought, they had accumulated an enormous debt and had no business assets to be used for payments. Archer Daniels Midland Company decided to enter the peanut business and bought Carter's Warehouse for almost as much as they owed. The United Press International ran an article noting, "Because of outstanding warehouse debts, the Carters are not expected to profit from the sale. 'I suspect the sale will get them out of debt and that's about all,' the Journal quoted an unidentified Carter family friend saying. The warehouse debt includes a \$1.2 million loan the National Bank of Georgia used to construct a peanut sheller between 1975 and 1976. The loan stood between \$700,000 and \$800,000 a year ago when it was assigned to the Trust Company of Georgia."⁴⁰ The Carters retained the farmland on which peanuts, cotton, soybeans, grain, and pine trees grew. Jimmy Carter eventually phased out his duties as an active farmer and relied on partners or renters who had modern equipment for planting, cultivating, and harvesting the fields. They enjoyed caring for the timberland while consulting with an expert forester.⁴¹

³⁹ Bird, *The Outlier*, 602-603.

⁴⁰ "Reports Carter Sells Peanut Business - UPI Archives," *UPI*, March 5, 1981.

⁴¹ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 204.

The Carters worked on remodeling their home in Plains to accompany their storage of papers and clothes they had brought with them from the White House. They also started to settle into a routine. Carter and his son Chip installed wooden plank flooring in the attic to store their papers and clothes. Rosalynn turned one bedroom into her office and another into a dressing room. Amy occupied one bedroom until she went off to boarding school in Atlanta. The ex-presidential couple always traveled in a car driven by the Secret Service, eliminating the need for a personal vehicle. Carter settled into a routine, walking as usual an hour before sunrise and then having breakfast with Rosalynn and Amy. In the afternoon, he often spent time in his wood shop, building furniture, or inspecting his farmland. He enjoyed a daily jog; he rarely ran more than two or three miles in Plains.⁴²

Jimmy Carter had a hidden talent that he kept with him through his presidency and afterward, that of woodworking and oil painting. While in the White House at Camp David, he found a nice wood shop, which he used many weekends to make small items as presents for friends and members of his family. When he arrived back in Plains after leaving the White House, since they no longer needed an automobile, Jimmy Carter turned his garage into a woodworking area, building a small guest apartment atop the garage. The Carters acquired a small log cabin built alongside Turniptown Creek in the North Georgia Mountains. Jimmy Carter designed and built all the beds, chairs, tables, storage cabinets, and smaller fixtures needed to furnish the home. He also built four ladder-back hickory chairs that were auctioned at Sotheby's in October 1983 for \$21,000 each to help fund The Carter Center. Every year after that, Carter donated a piece of handmade furniture to The Carter Center for sale at auction. He also donated one of his original paintings for the same purpose. The funds that were raised supported the Carter

⁴² Bird, *The Outlier*, 603-605.

Centers' work to wage peace, fight disease, and build hope in the world's poorest and most forgotten countries. In addition, he has given much of his furniture to his children and grandchildren, with cradles being used several times.⁴³

However, one of Carter's main passions has been his life as an author. Even Rosalynn Carter has spent time writing her memoirs. Their books sold well and provided a much-needed source of income for the family. The books also provided a unique opportunity to present their political views and describe their work at The Carter Center. President Carter wrote *Why Not the Best?* in 1974-75 to explain aspects of his presidency and found that he enjoyed writing. Later, *Keeping Faith* was one of Carter's first books, as he stated it was written to redeem his family finances. Carter was known to churn out two to three thousand words daily in a state-of-the-art computer word processor, costing him a hefty \$10,000. *Keeping Faith* was published in November of 1982, earning him another book contract. Two years later, Rosalynn published *First Lady from Plains*, a candid autobiography on the New York Times bestseller list for eighteen weeks.⁴⁴ In 1985, Carter wrote *The Blood of Abraham*, based on his extensive travel in the Middle East. This was where Carter met with key leaders, took careful notes of their personal opinions about the prospect of a comprehensive peace, and compiled this information from Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinians. In 1984, Rosalynn and Jimmy coauthored a book called *Everything to Gain*, which focused on personal health and how the major determining factor was often a person's habits and success or failure in adapting universally accepted health information. In 1988, Carter wrote a book entitled *An Outdoor Journal* about his experiences with nature, beginning with his boyhood and extending from their

⁴³ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 231-232.

⁴⁴ Bird, *The Outlier*, 604-605.

farm to trout streams and mountains in Alaska, Argentina, Japan, and Nepal. In 1992, Carter wrote two books, *Turning Point*, about his first political venture, and *Talking Peace: A Vision for the Next Generation*. Other books written by Carter include *Living Faith, Sources of Strength, The Virtues of Aging, Christmas in Plains, An Hour Before Daylight, The Hornet's Nest, Sharing Good Times, Our Endangered Values, Palestine Peace Not Apartheid, Beyond the White House, We Can Peace in the Holy Land, White House Diaries, and A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power*. Writing and promoting the sale of these books allowed Carter to study a wide range of subjects in great detail, to analyze what he learned, and to present his views to the general public in American and foreign countries.⁴⁵

Another avenue of income for Jimmy Carter, once out of the White House, was as a “distinguished professor” at Emory University in Atlanta. Emory University paid him to teach regularly and supplemented his \$69,630 federal pension as an ex-president. Jimmy Carter was guaranteed complete freedom of expression and had no obligations to teach specific students for a semester and deal with their grading. His duty to the university was to lecture large and small numbers of students on subjects. It is to be decided between him, the professors, and the deans. Jimmy Carter lectured in different schools and departments each month during the academic year, including history, political science, environmental studies, theology, African-American studies, business, medicine, nursing, and law. Carter never avoided answering a question because it might be politically or personally sensitive.⁴⁶ *The Private University Products and News* wrote, “Since he joined the faculty as a University Distinguished Professor 35 years ago, President Jimmy Carter has been a steady presence at Emory-fielding questions from first-year

⁴⁵ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 225-229.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 206.

students at his annual Town Hall, holding regular luncheons with small groups of faculty and staff, meeting monthly with the university president over breakfast, and appearing in classes and special forums during the fall and spring semesters. ‘I’ve taught in all the schools at Emory,’ Carter says. ‘It has kept me aware of the younger generation, their thoughts and ideals.’”⁴⁷

On a personal note, Jimmy Carter was plagued with the thoughts of a hereditary disease that began to take his family members. Jimmy Carter’s father, James Earl Carter Sr., passed when he was fifty-nine years old with pancreatic cancer. Jimmy Carter’s doctors at Emory University became concerned when his sister Ruth, in 1983, passed at fifty-four from the same disease, and five years later, his brother Billy, at fifty-one, died from the exact cause. The National Institute of Health began to check all members of the Carter family regularly, and Jimmy Carter’s last remaining sibling, Gloria, sixty-four, died of pancreatic cancer in 1990. There was no record of another American family having lost four members to this disease. Since then, Jimmy Carter has undergone regular X-rays, CAT scans, and blood analysis with hopes of early detection. By the time it is detected, cancer of the pancreas has often metastasized to other vital organs and is usually fatal within a few months. A worldwide search revealed a few other families like the Carters, and it is most likely that a genetic defect is involved, possibly triggered by smoking cigarettes. Jimmy Carter was the only nonsmoker in his family, which may have led to his longer life. ⁴⁸

The Carter Center is Carter’s legacy. It proved their most challenging obligation as they needed to raise about \$25 million in private contributions to build a presidential library. Jimmy Carter was a defeated Democratic candidate with no prospects of returning to public office, and

⁴⁷ Paige Parvin, “The Carter Connection at Emory University – PUPN,” *PUPN Magazine*.

⁴⁸ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 207.

he only had a few wealthy friends and supporters; he found the task difficult and time-consuming. Jimmy Carter was not interested in building a museum or storing his White House records and memorabilia. He wanted a place where they could work. He told Rosalynn one night, “I know what we can do for the future. We can create a place in Atlanta near our presidential library and museum and invite people to come there like Anwar Sadat, and Menachem Begin came to Camp David. I can offer my services as a mediator to help prevent or resolve conflicts, either within or between nations. If they prefer, I can go to their country.”⁴⁹ From this conversation, The Carter Center was born. They expanded the concept of the Center by including conferences on important issues such as peace in the Middle East, international security and arms control, business and the environment, education, and global health. Working with Emory, the Carters established The Carter Center legally in 1982, and during the next five years, Jimmy Carter spent much of his time raising funds from private donors to pay for the presidential library, with adjoining buildings to house the work of the Center. The Center adopted a few fundamental principles: The Center would be nonpartisan; it would be as innovative as possible, not duplicating or competing with other organizations that were addressing issues successfully; it would not be afraid of potential failure if their goals were worthwhile; and it would continuously operate with a balanced budget. The Carter Center expanded its operations into eighty nations, including the promotion of peace, human rights, democracy and freedom, and better health care.⁵⁰ With a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering, the Center works to prevent conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health. Over the years since its construction, The Carter Center has advanced some of these leading

⁴⁹ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety* 208.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 207-208.

highlights: it was the leading coalition that reduced the incidence of Guinea worm disease by 99.99 percent, making it likely to be the first human disease since smallpox to be eradicated; it observed 115 elections in 40 countries to help establish and strengthen democracies; it furthered avenues to peace in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, the Korean Peninsula, Haiti, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Middle East; and it is helping to establish a village-based health care delivery system in thousands of communities in Africa that now have trained health care personnel and volunteers to distribute drugs and provide health education.⁵¹

One of The Carter Center's main initiatives was domestic and international health care. In the mid-1980s, the AIDS virus became a national epidemic, and Jimmy Carter angrily blamed President Reagan for ignoring a plague that was disproportionately killing homosexuals, African Americans, and drug addicts. "What did Christ do with Lepers? He had love for them. Even if we condemn what causes AIDS, we should have compassion for the victims."⁵² President Carter spoke to faith-based groups to increase efforts to address the HIV/AIDS crisis during his mission to Africa with Gates in 2002. "How do we fortunate people, we rich people, we blessed and secure people, react to this blight of AIDS and the world? We have 900,000 AIDS sufferers in my country. We spend 10 billion dollars each year on this problem, which if you figure it out is about 10 thousand US dollars per patient. You have 3.6 million HIV-positive people in Nigeria."⁵³

⁵¹ "Carter Center Accomplishments," *The Carter Center*, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/about/accomplishments.html>.

⁵² Bird, *The Outlier*, 610.

⁵³ Jimmy Carter, "President Carter- Faith-Based Groups Confronting HIV/AIDS" (speech, March 10, 2022), Bill & Melinda Gates, <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/speeches/2002/03/president-jimmy-carter-hiv aids>.

The disease closely associated with The Carter Center was to eliminate dracunculiasis, otherwise known as Guinea worm disease. Dr. Peter Bourne introduced Jimmy Carter to the disease in 1986 when Bourne was serving as an assistant secretary-general in the United Nations. Jimmy Carter knew that smallpox had been eliminated in the 1970s, so he asked Bourne what other diseases might be eliminated by a similar public health campaign. Bourne replied that the Guinea worm disease could be treated, but the political will was lacking. At the time, the disease was maiming 3.5 million people each year in Africa and the Indian subcontinent. People became infected simply by drinking dirty water contaminated by Guinea worm larvae. The larva spent as much as a year in the human body until it emerged through the skin as a full-grown worm measuring two to three feet in length. Victims often became incapacitated. Jimmy Carter raised millions of dollars from private individuals and corporations and created a program to try to identify every case of the disease. Villagers had to be taught to avoid contaminated water. It was an enormously complicated public health undertaking stretching much of Central Africa and Pakistan.

By 1993, Carter's efforts had eradicated Guinea worm disease in Pakistan. In 1995, the Carters toured villages in Nigeria and met with victims of the disease. The Carters never gave up; by 2018, the number of human cases had fallen to twenty-eight individuals.⁵⁴ From January 1st to December 31st, 2023, The Carter Center reports the total number of human cases of Guinea worm is fourteen.⁵⁵ Since 1986, the Carter Center has led the international fight to eradicate Guinea worm disease while working with ministries of health and local communities, the U.S.

⁵⁴ Bird, *The Outlier*, 610-611.

⁵⁵ "Guinea Worm Case Totals," *The Carter Center*, accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea_worm/case-totals.html.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, and UNICEF. Guinea worm disease could become the second human disease in history, after smallpox, to be eradicated. Guinea worm would be the first parasitic disease to be eradicated from the planet and the first disease to be erased without a vaccine or medicine.⁵⁶

Another public health issue that Jimmy Carter and The Carter Center tackled in Africa was the issue of onchocerciasis or river blindness. This affliction was caused by another parasitic worm, transmitted to humans through the bites of black flies. The resulting worms often gestated for years under the human skin, causing a terrible skin rash, weight loss, and, after a dozen years, lesions in the eyes that lead to total blindness. Around 20.9 million people are infected with the parasite that causes river blindness, and 240 million are at risk of the disease in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Yemen. The Carter Center works to eliminate river blindness in Brazil, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, and Venezuela. The Carter Center's Onchocerciasis Elimination Program for the Americas has successfully transmitted river blindness from Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Guatemala.⁵⁷ In 1987, Dr. Roy Vagelos, the chairman of Merck, a large pharmaceutical company, announced it had developed a pill to prevent river blindness and arrest its development in those already infected. A single pill of Mectizan was effective if taken annually. The cure for the disease that afflicted millions of people, however, was cheap but not at the capacity to where the people of Africa who were so poor could afford it. Merck's Vagelos concluded that the right thing to do was to give away Mectizan to those who needed it in villages all over Africa and Latin America. Vagelos offered to donate \$80 million

⁵⁶ "Guinea Worm Eradication Program," *The Carter Center*, accessed May 10, 2024, https://www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea_worm/index.html.

⁵⁷ "River Blindness Elimination Program," *The Carter Center*, accessed May 10, 2024, https://www.cartercenter.org/health/river_blindness/index.html.

worth of Mectizan tablets if The Carter Center could figure out how to distribute the pills. Jimmy Carter used his status as an ex-president to prod African leaders to organize the complex distribution of the pill. Between 1988 and 1995, The Carter Center helped to distribute 29 million Mectizan tablets. In 1998, when the discovery was made that the same essential medicine could also address elephantiasis or “big foot disease,” the program was expanded. By 2017, Merck was providing medicine for 100 million treatments annually.⁵⁸

Leaning on Jimmy Carter’s roots, in 1985, Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug, Japanese philanthropist Ryoichi Sasakawa, and Carter met in Geneva, Switzerland, and decided to organize Global 2000. Global 2000 was an agricultural program designed to increase the production of food grains in several places in Africa.⁵⁹ They began their project in Ghana, Sudan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe and expanded it to fourteen African nations. It eventually reached 8 million African families by teaching them how to double or triple their maize, wheat, rice, sorghum, and millet production. With Japanese funding, Dr. Borlaug’s knowledge of agronomy, and The Carter Center’s help with organization and implementation, the families were taught how to use the best seed, plant in contoured rows to minimize erosion, use necessary fertilizer, control weeds, harvest at the right time, and store and market crops properly. Usually meeting with forty farmers in a country, the demonstrators expanded, and in three years, the program grew to about sixteen thousand.⁶⁰ Dr. Norman Borlaug and Jimmy Carter noted in the article “Food for Thought,” “It took around 10,000 years for the world farmers to reach their current production of nearly six billion gross tons of food, consumed virtually in its entirety by 6.4

⁵⁸ Bird, *The Outlier*, 611-612.

⁵⁹ The Global 2000 Report Hearing Before The Subcommittee on International Economics of the Joint Economic Committee Congress of the United States, 96th Congress, 2nd Session, September 4, 1980.

⁶⁰ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 211-212.

billion people annually. Within 50 years, we will have to increase this amount by at least another 50%-- to nine billion tons. Most likely we will have to achieve this feat on a shrinking agricultural land base, and with most of the production increases occurring in those countries where it is to be consumed.”⁶¹

Peace was a hallmark of Jimmy Carter’s presidency and a plight that did not stop when he left the White House. The Carter Center and Jimmy Carter engaged in conflict resolution efforts with the United Nations, although they mainly addressed issues on their own. Jimmy Carter took on various groups and leaders such as Maoists in Nepal, the Communist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia, Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Radovan Karadzic in Bosnia and Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, Kim II Sung and his successors in North Korea, the Castro brothers in Cuba, Omar al-Bashir in Sudan, and leaders of Hamas in Gaza. In every case, Jimmy Carter kept the American leaders informed about his plans and the results of his efforts. An example of Jimmy Carter’s peace deals on behalf of The Carter Center came in 1994. President Kim II Sung of North Korea requested that Jimmy Carter come to Pyongyang to help resolve some of the antagonism between him and the government of the United States. Jimmy Carter had an initial aversion derived from the Korean War, but he was convinced that his services might be helpful. In 1994, North Korea disavowed its commitment to the Nonproliferation Treaty, expelled international inspectors from its nuclear facility, and began processing spent uranium rods into plutonium. President Bill Clinton rejected Jimmy Carter’s request to go to Pyongyang; however, after an interception by Vice President Al Gore, Clinton

⁶¹ LLC - Ames Global Reach Internet Productions, “‘food for Thought’ by World Food Prize Council of Advisors Members Dr. Norman Borlaug and Jimmy Carter,” *The World Food Prize Foundation*, accessed May 10, 2024, https://www.worldfoodprize.org/index.cfm/87428/40056/food_for_thought_by_world_food_prize_council_of_advisors_members_dr_norman_borlaug_and_jimmy_carter.

finally gave his approval. Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter were the first persons in forty-three years to travel directly from Seoul across the Demilitarized Zone and on to Pyongyang. With Jimmy Carter's knowledge of nuclear engineering, he could discuss the ongoing issues. During a long boat ride, Carter and Kim II Sung reached an agreement about a dozen important subjects, including the nuclear problem and the return of international inspectors, summit talks with South Korea, withdrawal of troops from proximity to the DMZ, and recovery of the remains of buried Americans. Carter reported the agreements to the White House. Former President Carter gave an interview to Frontline in 2003, noting that he believed that the two nations were on the view of war in 1994 and that it was the job of the U.S. to agree to direct negotiations to resolve the conflict.⁶² Kim II Sung died soon after Carter left. However, he received word that Kim Jong II would honor his father's wishes. Official talks in Geneva resulted in approval from both sides, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang in October 2000 to strengthen their mutual commitments. However, the U.S.-North Korea agreement was disavowed in 2002 by President George W. Bush, who branded North Korea as an "evil empire." Now, Kim Sung's successors have expanded their development of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. The United States avoids almost all contact with North Korea, and strict economic sanctions are imposed on the often starving people.⁶³ The Bush administration, in 2002, released a report that emphasized pre-emptively attacking countries developing weapons of mass destruction. The report specifically mentions North Korea. Also, in 2002, there was a leaked Nuclear Posture

⁶² Jimmy Carter, "Interviews - Jimmy Carter, Kim's Nuclear Gamble, Frontline," *PBS*, April 10, 2003, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim/interviews/carter.html>.

⁶³ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 214-215.

Review that listed North Korea as a country against which the United States should be prepared to use nuclear weapons, though it does not mention pre-emptive nuclear strike.⁶⁴

The Carter Center, through Jimmy Carter's mediation of civil conflicts, began to propose honest elections. The Center started to monitor elections in Latin America, and soon, they were asked to work in other countries around the world. The center's role was to help nations develop democratic societies by empowering the citizens and improving election standards. “ ‘People who had asked us previously to monitor an election said we don't want people from America to come in and tell us how to run our election because we think we have just as good a procedure as you do,’ Carter said. ‘But that time has passed now. And I think most people look upon the Carter Center and its reputation and the number of good results we've had as an organization to be trusted even though the United States system of elections may not be admirable.’”⁶⁵ The routine was to spend four to six long-term observers in a country for an extended period before the election to learn everything possible, such as the country's history, geography, government, and politics. They also became acquainted with political parties, candidates, and issues. They assessed the registration of voters and the integrity and competency of the central election commission. Several days before the election, the Center sent forty to eighty short-term observers, and they received crash courses from the long-term observers. They visited as many polling sites as possible, and the observer teams reported to Jimmy, Rosalynn Carter, and other leaders who remained in the capital city. The Carter Center developed a handheld electronic tablet called an ELMO that permitted each observer to report the situation at each site

⁶⁴ “The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance,” *The U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework at a Glance*, *Arms Control Association*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/agreedframework>.

⁶⁵ “Former President Carter Reflects before Milestone Mission,” *The Carter Center*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/latest-news/media-coverage/ap-carter-reflects-before-milestone.html>.

immediately. After the Center had consolidated and assessed the information from all observers, it announced whether the election process had been fair and free, accurately representing the people's will.⁶⁶

With Jimmy Carter's passion projects still intact outside the White House, Rosalynn Carter could focus on her primary mental health mission. About one in five adults and one in eight children suffered from mental or emotional problems. Yet, many of them, including a majority of the children, failed to receive appropriate mental health care. After the Reagan-Bush years, with the election of Bill Clinton, Rosalynn Carter was optimistic about the Clinton healthcare reform headed by Clinton's wife, Hillary Clinton.⁶⁷ However, it only agreed in principle with Rosalynn Carter's call for parity in insurance coverage for mental and physical illnesses. It presented to Congress a plan that would limit mental health care to a total of sixty days of hospital treatment and thirty sessions of outpatient therapy, with the patient having to pay for half those sessions. Rosalynn Carter attacked the plan, saying that poor individuals could not afford the copayment for therapy. Rosalynn went on to team up with Betty Ford. Mrs. Ford had suffered from alcoholism and drug abuse, and it was only after her family's intervention that she checked into a rehabilitation clinic in 1978. Four years later, the Betty Ford Center at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage, California.⁶⁸ Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter agreed to give bipartisan backing to the cause of parity in insurance coverage. In March of 1994, they appeared before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.⁶⁹ Rosalynn Carter also

⁶⁶ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 222-223.

⁶⁷ *National Archives and Records Administration*, n.d., accessed May 10, 2024, <https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/Accomplishments/eightyears-07.html>.

⁶⁸ "Hazelden Betty Ford: Drug and Alcohol Treatment Centers," *Hazelden Betty Ford, | Drug and Alcohol Treatment Centers*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/>.

⁶⁹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 149-151.

worked with The Carter Center to advance the cause of mental health. The Carter Center continues to champion the rights of people with mental illnesses. They promote awareness about mental health issues, inform public policy, achieve equity for mental health care comparable to other health care, and reduce stigma and discrimination against those with mental illnesses.⁷⁰ Since 1985, The Center has hosted symposia on mental health, with each gathering focusing on a particular aspect of the subject. It also offers fellowships to journalists to do work on mental health. Rosalynn Carter was also the chair of the World Federation's International Committee of Women Leaders for Mental Health.⁷¹ The World Federation for Mental Health aims to promote mental health awareness, prevention of mental disorders, advocacy, and best practice recovery-focused interventions worldwide. The goals of the WFMH are "to heighten public awareness about the importance of mental health, and to gain understanding and improve attitudes about mental disorders, to promote mental health and prevent mental disorders, and to improve the care, treatment, and recovery of people with mental disorders."⁷²

From the outgrowth of Rosalynn Carter's work with mental health came her interest in the subject of caregiving. She watched her father die at home, her mother-in-law had passed away, and her mother had suffered from several physical ailments. Through her personal experiences and what she had experienced working with The Carter Center, Rosalynn Carter realized there was a need for those who provided care to their loved ones. This concern for the mental well-being of caregivers caught the attention of Georgia's state university system, which

⁷⁰ "Mental Health Program," *The Carter Center*, accessed May 10, 2024, https://www.cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/index.html.

⁷¹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter* 152.

⁷² "About Us," *World Federation for Mental Health*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://wfmh.global/who-we-are/about-us>.

asked her to act as director of an institute focused on caregiving. The Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving (RCI) opened in 1987 at Rosalynn Carter's alma mater Georgia Southwestern State University. It promotes programs to assist caregivers in meeting the challenges of their tasks and to educate the public on the needs of caregivers.⁷³ The Rosalynn Carter Institute was founded to promote health, strength, and resilience. To fulfill the promise of Rosalynn Carter, they champion the family caregiver by creating a cross-sector partnership, leading research projects and strategic initiatives, developing and implementing evidence-based programs, and advocating for public policy.⁷⁴

Rosalynn Carter was true to her spirit of volunteerism both in and out of the White House. She had a hand in creating an international exchange program. When Jimmy Carter was governor of Georgia, Jimmy, and Rosalynn established an exchange program between Georgia and Brazil. Friendship Force was born as a nonprofit organization established by the Carters and headquartered in Atlanta.⁷⁵ Rosalynn Carter was the honorary chair until 2002, when she resigned to protest the organization's fiscal conservatism and unwillingness to expand its operations. The Friendship Force was designed to promote international cultural understanding, and the program was open to any adult American. Participants who pay their way travel to foreign countries and live with host families; upon their return to the United States, these "ambassadors," as they were called, welcome their host families in return to the United States. By 2006, nearly half a million individuals had participated in Friendship Force exchanges.⁷⁶

⁷³ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 153.

⁷⁴ "Promoting Caregiver Health, Strength, and Resilience," *Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://rosalynncarter.org/about-us/>.

⁷⁵ "A World of Friends Is a World of Peace," *Friendship Force*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.thefriendshipforce.org/>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 154-155.

A testament to Rosalynn and Jimmy's hard work and dedication to volunteerism and serving the will of others was shown through their work with Habitat for Humanity.⁷⁷ For over thirty-one years, the Carters led groups of volunteers for a full week of hard work, building and renovating homes for poor families. The families were required to pay the total price for their houses over twenty years, with no interest charges, and payments were invariably less than rental charges. The families were also expected to put in several hundred hours of labor on their own or neighbors' homes. Habitat leaders and Carter worked to approve the site location and basic design of the homes about a year in advance. Their normal projects included about one hundred homes, and the goal was to complete construction in five days, beginning on a Monday with just the foundation in place. The size of the work crews was adjusted due to schedule demands, which ranged from twelve to thirty-five people depending on the size of the homes and the type of construction. The general policy that the Carters and Habitat for Humanity tried to arrange was to alternate their annual work projects between the United States and foreign countries, as they have completed projects in many American states and Hungary, South Africa, Mexico, South Korea, Canada, the Philippines, Haiti, China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and South Korea.⁷⁸

Even though he was a one-term President, President Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter did not let his time in Washington, D.C., stop them from continuing their passion projects. “We just have to remember that our country is resilient. We have always had down through history the ability when we make serious mistakes like slavery or the segregation years, or the failure to let women have the right to vote and so forth- we have always been able to correct our

⁷⁷ “Every Donation,” *Habitat for Humanity*, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.habitat.org/>.

⁷⁸ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 224-225.

mistakes,' he said.”⁷⁹ The Carters have a lasting legacy that continued even after their time in office. They have impacted the American people's lives in both the social and political scheme through their reputation of integrity and dedication to solving problems set before them. Jimmy Carter created a lasting legacy by advocating human rights, facilitating peace agreements in the Middle East, and supporting global development initiatives. Rosalynn Carter shaped her husband's presidency and advocated for mental health and women's rights. With their faith rooted in Christian traditions and strong moral principles, they were dedicated to social justice through a tireless service to make the world a better place for future generations.

Rosalynn Carter impacted how future First Ladies would respond to the office of the First Lady. Every First Lady since Rosalynn Carter has directly impacted policy initiatives during their husband's administration. They have kept up the Office of the First Lady and worked in extension of the office of the President of the United States to make changes to the landscape of the United States. While Nancy Reagan was in office, she got asked a question during an interview for *Time Magazine*, noting what she thought it took to be a successful First Lady. Nancy Reagan responded: “I am not Rosalynn Carter. I am not Pat Nixon or Jackie Kennedy. Everybody does it differently. I discovered I would find it difficult to just sit here and not do anything except entertain. For me, having a goal is very important.”⁸⁰ Nancy Reagan had political instincts, and she played a role in the removal of several of his cabinet and staff members. She worked with the Foster Grandparents Program, for which she published a book. In 1981, she embarked on a crusade to sponsor a bill entitled “Just Say No,” an anti-drug campaign. Barbara Bush took the First Lady position with stride. She established the Barbara Bush

⁷⁹ “President and Professor: Carter Shares Insights with Emory Students: Emory University: Atlanta Ga,” *News*, accessed May 10, 2024, https://news.emory.edu/stories/2016/09/er_carter_town_hall_coverage/campus.html.

⁸⁰ Lily Rothman, “Nancy Reagan on Being First Lady: What She Said in 1985,” *Time*, March 6, 2016.

Foundation for Family Literacy, to which she had undertaken a leadership role to improve literacy in the United States. Unlike Rosalynn Carter, Barbara Bush took a different approach to the First Ladyship. She completed advocacy roles as First Lady, but she was content with running a household then helping her husband run the country. Barbara Bush once noted, “I don’t fool around with his office, and he doesn’t fool around with my household.”⁸¹ Hillary Clinton was the first president’s wife to have a professional degree from the same institution as her husband and a successful career. Clinton wrote a weekly column called “Talking It Over” that ran in newspapers nationwide and completed activist notions around the globe, laying wreaths for fallen soldiers and meeting with foreign dignitaries to discuss human rights. Upon Rosalynn Carter’s death, Hillary Clinton released a statement: “Thanks to her mental health advocacy, more people live with better care and less stigma. Because of her early leadership on childhood immunization, millions of Americans have grown up healthier. And through her decades of work at the Carter Center and with Habitat for Humanity, she spread hope, health, and democracy across the globe.”⁸² Hillary Clinton was influenced by Rosalynn Carter’s push in the health care field when she initiated a health care plan under her husband that would have expanded access to health care to families regardless of immigration status, allowing families to buy health insurance on the health exchanges along with rural health programs.

Laura Bush continued the legacy of her mother-in-law with literacy improvement but added breast cancer awareness and attention to Alzheimer’s disease. Upon Rosalynn Carter’s death, Mrs. Bush and her husband released a statement: “There is no greater advocate of President Carter, and their partnership set a wonderful example of loyalty and fidelity. She leaves

⁸¹ Will Dunham, Barbara Bush, Wife and Mother of U.S. Presidents, Dies at 92, Reuters, April 17, 2018.

⁸² Sarah Fortinsky, “ Clintons Mourn Rosalynn Carter: ‘She Spread Hope, Health and Democracy across the Globe,’” *The Hill*, November 19, 2023.

behind an important legacy in her work to destigmatize mental health. We join our fellow citizens in sending our condolences to President Carter and their family.”⁸³ Laura Bush was like Rosalynn in the notion that she strongly supported her husband. She has always stuck by his side, although not going as far as Rosalynn did as White House counsel. Michelle Obama used the popularity of Let’s Move! To help pass new Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act laws for increased funding for school lunches and to update the health requirements for school meals and snacks. Upon Rosalynn Carter’s death, Michelle Obama released a statement: “When our family was in the White House, every so often, Rosalynn would join me for lunch, offering a few words of advice and always- always- a helping hand. She reminded me to make the role of First Lady my own, just like she did. I’ll always remain grateful for her support and her generosity.”⁸⁴ Melania Trump was a leading voice in the public and private sectors on the negative impact of opioids on children and families as she encouraged the public-private sector partnerships to help overcome the epidemic. Upon the passing of Rosalynn Carter, Melania Trump posted the following to Truth Social: “Rosalynn Carter leaves behind a meaningful legacy not only as First Lady but as a wife and mother. We will always remember her servant’s heart and devotion to her husband, family, and country. May she rest in peace.”⁸⁵ Melania followed Rosalynn’s footsteps, ensuring her son Barron had a normal child in the White House. Rosalynn pushed for her daughter Amy to have a normal life while in the White House by attending public school, having friends over, and even putting a tree house in the back of the White House lawn. As First Lady, Jill Biden has

⁸³ “Reactions to the Death of Rosalynn Carter, Former First Lady and Global Humanitarian,” *AP News*, November 20, 2023.

⁸⁴ *Michelle Obama, Former First Lady*, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.rosalynncartertribute.org/memories/tributes/michelle-obama.html>.

⁸⁵ Sarah Fortinsky, “Trump, Melania Mourn Loss of Rosalynn Carter,” *The Hill*, November 20, 2023.

been reaching out to all Americans to unite America.⁸⁶ Jill Biden noted that Rosalynn Carter inspired a nation through her statement upon Rosalynn's passing: "She was a champion for equal rights and opportunities for women and girls; an advocate for mental health and wellness for every person; and a supporter of the often unseen and uncompensated caregivers of our children, aging loved ones, and people with disabilities."⁸⁷ Both Mrs. Biden and Mrs. Carter worked to inspire a nation to unite together for causes of passion. Through the extension of the office of the First Lady by Rosalynn Carter. Future First Ladies have found a platform to change America's social and political fabric.

Jimmy and Rosalynn's plights and passions will live on through their legacies and others, but their family ties will live on through the bonds of their children. They bore four children into this world: Jack, Chip, Jeff, and Amy; they each have left a lasting impact on America's framework on their mark. Throughout Jimmy Carter's plight through politics, each of his children was instrumental in helping him to climb the ladder of success, whether working in the warehouse, on the campaign trail, or helping with policy initiatives once in office. His children have always stood by his side, as Rosalynn did. She ensured that there was room for all of their children and spouses when they moved into the White House. Being the youngest, Amy Carter was always made to feel like an average child in the White House, without all the pomp and circumstances of the office. Their children have grown up to lead lives befitting their parents' traditional values, even though they might have swayed a little, as all children do. John William

⁸⁶ "The Role of First Lady: Martha Washington to Laura Bush - First Ladies with Strong Impact on Their Husbands' Presidencies," First ladies with strong impact on their husbands' presidencies - 2- policy, war, election, foreign, second, new deal, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.presidentprofiles.com/General-Information/The-Role-of-First-Lady-Martha-Washington-to-Laura-Bush-First-ladies-with-strong-impact-on-their-husbands-presidencies.html>.

⁸⁷ "Reactions to the Death of Rosalynn Carter, Former First Lady and Global Humanitarian," *AP News*, November 20, 2023.

“Jack” Carter is the eldest son of the Carters. He spent his adult years at Georgia Institute of Technology but left to join the US Navy during the Vietnam War. He was discharged after he was caught smoking marijuana. He later reenrolled at Georgia Tech and earned a degree in nuclear physics. Jack Carter also took a hand in US politics, winning the Democratic primary for the US Senate in Nevada in 2006. Still, he lost the general election to Republican John Ensign on issues such as opposing the Iraq War and improving healthcare for veterans. James Earl “Chip” Carter III worked in the family peanut warehouse before he was elected to the Plains City Council and worked on the Democratic National Committee. It was revealed in the documentary *Jimmy Carter: Rock & Roll President* that Chip and singer Willie Nelson smoked marijuana on the White House roof. Donnel “Jeff” Carter studied geography and computer cartography, and he later co-founded the company Computer Mapping Consultants with his former professor. Amy Carter spent her childhood years in the White House while Jimmy Carter served as president; therefore, she was in the political and media spotlight as a young child. She is known for her political activism by participating in protests and sit-ins against US foreign policy in Central America and apartheid in South Africa. She was once arrested in 1986, with several others, during a protest against CIA recruitment. However, she was acquitted of the charges.⁸⁸

Historians were working to uncover the narrative of research that placed Carter’s presidency in a “revisionist” period as the consensus of historians today saw the potential for “revisionist” transformations of past presidents’ images and their place in American history. As personal and official documents were being sourced from Carter’s administration, his presidency was being examined in a new light compared to his successors. Hubert Humphrey questioned Carter’s liberal credentials when he emerged as a national candidate for the 1976 Democratic

⁸⁸ “Everything We Know about Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter’s Children,” *The Independent*, May 24, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/rosalynn-jimmy-carter-children-funeral-b2454760.html>.

nomination. However, it was more common to view Carter's campaign with themes such as modernization during the post-Watergate environment. The idea that Carter could win the election of 1976 with a coalition of the industrial Northeast, the traditionally Democratic South, and, significantly, blacks reinforced the legitimacy of his New Deal lineage for most. However, other interpretations reflected a mixed verdict on both Carter's place on the ideological spectrum and his impact on the Democratic party.

On the one hand, Carter has been identified more closely with the modern G.O.P. tradition than the New Deal-Great Society Democratic framework. Laurence Shoup worked on an analysis of prospective presidential candidates before the 1980s election, to which he placed Carter in the dead political center. He labeled the categories "Centrist" and "Corporate State Conservative" and added other people such as Republicans Howard Baker, George Bush, John Anderson, and Elliot Richardson. However, most historians have continued to place Carter firmly within the welfare-state Democratic traditions. They believe that events forced him to stray from the party's traditions. Political scientist Paul Light stated that Carter's initial domestic program was within the Democratic "mainstream." Historian William Leuchtenburg noted that Carter did not try consciously to evoke the New Deal tradition. Instead, he distanced himself from Roosevelt's image and tradition, to which Leuchtenburg stated this decision, which deprived him of the constituency Carter might have otherwise claimed. Colin Campbell, another historian, noted in his study of presidential management style, agreed that Carter avoided identification with traditional liberal Democratic ideals but contended that this fact represented ambivalence on Carter's part rather than a conscious decision. Historian Frank Annunziata pointed out in his examination of Carter's presidency that his inconsistencies related to the political environment, suggesting that Carter was motivated primarily by a realistic approach to

seeing the restraints of the maturing welfare state.⁸⁹ With the post-Watergate political environment and Carter's insistence on breaking the mold of the Washington stereotype by being an outsider, the problem that historians had looking into his presidency was a lack of hindsight. To answer questions about Jimmy Carter and how his influence and impact on the world had made a difference, time was the key. His work outside the White House helped shed light on the job he started while in office.

Each phase of Jimmy Carter's life left him with unique perspectives. His early childhood was spent on a farm in Archery, Georgia, during the Great Depression. He was mainly isolated from his family and deprived, compared to life with modern advantages. He deemed his years in college and the navy gratifying as the Carters set up a house and welcomed a growing family. Carter deemed his submarine experiences good training in meeting challenges and an item that appealed to voters when he ran for office. As a farmer and businessman for seventeen years, he established a sound financial base for his family, learned how to deal with hundreds of customers, and partnered with Rosalynn in all aspects of life. Carter's political life brought accomplishment, regret of the unrealized goals, and enhancements for life after the White House.⁹⁰ Each phase of Carter's life was a stepping stone to increasing a path for paving a better way for a new America.

Rosalynn and Jimmy Carter formed a bond that lasted personally and professionally. The Carters worked through ways to resolve their disputes and maintain a strong marriage throughout their days. She was shyder than he was; he got up much earlier than she did. Although he was no

⁸⁹ Gary W Reichard, "Early Returns: Assessing Jimmy Carter," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 20, no. 3: 603–20, accessed Summer 1990.

⁹⁰ Carter, *Reflections At Ninety*, 237-238.

longer intent on punctuality as he was in the Navy, he still liked to live on a schedule; she did not. Nevertheless, their partnership remained strong. They learned that if they had a disagreement and if they talked about it and that did not work, it was best to allow things to cool down before discussing the issue again.

On the other hand, they found that if they wrote down their thoughts about the problems and shared them with the others, it also worked. They divided their responsibilities at home. She handled the finances as she did when they worked in the warehouse. They have won numerous awards for their work. In 2002, Jimmy Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize. Rosalynn Carter won various accolades, particularly for her work in mental health, including the American Society of Journalists and Authors Award for *Helping Someone with Mental Illness*. However, nothing was as unique as the time shared between Carter's completing work that lasted generations and impacted Americans long past their time in the White House.⁹¹

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter established a moral principle that guided them in establishing an American political and social system that has lasted for generations in the American framework. Through her bond with Jimmy Carter, Rosalynn Carter made her office as First Lady and extension of the main branch of the Executive branch. As a true equal partner in life and the professional arena, Rosalynn Carter challenged Jimmy Carter to change America's social and political structure while creating a stamp on the framework of society herself. As a Washington outsider, Jimmy Carter used his small-town Southern values entrusted to him through his mentors and family to uphold a foundational political structure based on honesty and integrity. The First Lady and the Presidency have been shaped by the bond of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, as future couples have followed suit in using their platforms to enhance their agendas of the

⁹¹ Kaufman, *Rosalynn Carter*, 165-166.

office. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter left a mark on America that withstood not only their four-year term as President but a lasting legacy for future generations to model for years to come.

On May 30, 2023, it was announced to the world that Rosalynn Carter had dementia. She continued to live at home with Jimmy Carter in Plains. On November 19, 2023, the world lost an icon, and Jimmy Carter lost his formidable partner. Rosalynn was 96 years old, the oldest first lady. Jimmy and Rosalynn had been married for seventy-seven years. Jimmy Carter stated at 99, the oldest living president, about his wife's passing, "Rosalynn was my equal partner in everything I ever accomplished. She gave me wise guidance and encouragement when I needed it. As long as Rosalynn was in the world, I always knew somebody loved and supported me."⁹² Jimmy Carter is now the only surviving member of the Carter team. He is the oldest living president in recorded history. Jimmy Carter is living in Plains, Georgia, under the guidance of hospice as he stopped treatment for melanoma. The Carter team changed the game of American politics both on the political and social framework. Through their work, they created a domestic and international change that has lasted into the twenty-first century.

⁹² "Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter Passes Away at Age 96," *The Carter Center*, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2023/statement-rosalynn-carter-111923.html>.

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