

THE JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK: A PRESIDENTIAL SITE AS  
A NON-PARTISAN SPACE

by

ALLISON E. MAIER

(Under the Direction of Scott Nesbit)

ABSTRACT

The Jimmy Carter National Historic Park was established in 1987 under the control of the National Park Service to commemorate the life of the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. The interpretation here attempts to portray Carter as an apolitical figure. While this is not necessarily false, it is not the unvarnished reality. This thesis examines the history of the preservation of presidential sites and the formation of interpretation plans. Jimmy Carter's current non-partisan public image is not an accident. Carter carefully cultivated this image from early on his political career, a career which will be investigated in this thesis. This work will analyze the interpretation plan that is set forth at this site and what steps that they take to create this apolitical narrative.

INDEX WORDS: Interpretation, interpretation plan, Jimmy Carter, presidential history, cultural heritage, National Historic Park, non-partisan politics

THE JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK: A PRESIDENTIAL SITE AS  
A NON-PARTISAN SPACE

by

ALLISON E. MAIER

B.A., University of Georgia, 2019

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2021

© 2021

Allison E. Maier

All Rights Reserved

THE JIMMY CARTER NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK: A PRESIDENTIAL SITE AS  
A NON-PARTISAN SPACE

by

ALLISON E. MAIER

Major Professor:	Scott Nesbit
Committee:	James K. Reap
	Akela Reason
	Evan Kutzler

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott  
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2021

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wonderful parents who have had to endure years of History Channel documentaries and presidential facts. Without your support, I would not be where I am today.

To Poppa, I always wanted to make you proud. I wish you could be here to read this.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give my sincerest thanks to Dr. Nesbit for his support, his time and guidance through this process. I would also like to thank my committee members for taking time out of their busy schedules to help in my endeavor to graduate.

Additionally, I want to thank Lizzy for always listening to me, Blake for his constant words of encouragement and Kaley for supplying me with fuel (iced coffee) while I was writing. Megan, Olivia, Shelby and Seth, I simply would not have gotten this thesis done without y'all. Lastly, many thanks are given to Pretzelz, the best emotional support cat since age 8.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction .....	1
Methodology.....	2
Limitations.....	3
Literature Review .....	4
Research Question .....	9
Organization .....	9
2 Preservation of Presidential Sites, the Construction of a Presidential Legacy, and the Formation of an Interpretation Plan .....	11
Preservation of Presidential Sites .....	11
Presidential Sites as Domestic Spaces.....	18
Construction of a Presidential Legacy.....	19
Formation of an Interpretation Plan .....	22
3 Jimmy Carter: A White Liberal Southerner .....	27
Pre-Presidency .....	32
Presidency.....	42
Post-Presidency .....	50
4 Jimmy Carter National Historic Park: Establishment, Plains High School.....	55
History of Plains .....	57

Establishment .....	59
Plains High School .....	63
COVID-19 Effects .....	77
5 Jimmy Carter National Historic Park: Boyhood Farm and Plains Depot.....	79
The Boyhood Home .....	79
Plains Train Depot.....	88
Carter Compound .....	94
Plains .....	99
6 Conclusion.....	104
REFERENCES .....	115



## **List of Figures**

	Page
Figure 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s original plan for his library, 1937.....	14
Figure 2. Earl and Lillian Carter.....	28
Figure 3. Jimmy and Rosalynn on their wedding day, July 1946.....	30
Figure 4. TIME Cover May 1971.....	37
Figure 5. Carter campaign speech with Rosalynn, Amy and Lillian Carter.....	39
Figure 6. The Carters on the inauguration route to the White House, 1977.....	43
Figure 7. The Carters with Dolly Parton, October 1979.....	45
Figure 8. 1980 Electoral Map.....	50
Figure 9. Carter working for Habitat for Humanity, October 2019.....	53
Figure 10. Audio Tour Sign Example.....	57
Figure 11. Map of Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District..	60
Figure 12. Jimmy Carter Historical Marker.....	63
Figure 13. Exterior of Plains High School.....	64
Figure 14. Wards Chapel Church School and Plains High School comparison.....	67
Figure 15. Re-creation of Julia Coleman’s Classroom.....	69
Figure 16. Interpretative piece in Julia Coleman’s office.....	70
Figure 17. Resolute Desk.....	73
Figure 18. Material Culture in Plains High School.....	74
Figure 19. Mock voting booth in Plains High School.....	75
Figure 20. Jimmy Carter National Historic Site website.....	78

Figure 21. Exterior of the Boyhood Home.....	79
Figure 22. Jack and Rachel Clark House.....	83
Figure 23. Carter Boyhood Home landscape.....	85
Figure 24. Price list in the Commissary.....	87
Figure 25. Exterior of Plains Train Depot.....	89
Figure 26. “The Grin Will Win” campaign button.....	91
Figure 27. 1970s encased television.....	92
Figure 28. Carter Compound.....	95
Figure 29. Gnann House.....	96
Figure 30. Downtown Plains.....	99
Figure 31. Peanut with Carter-esque grin.....	100
Figure 32. Peanut behind Plains Depot.....	100
Figure 33. Billy Carter Gas Station exterior.....	102
Figure 34. Carter and Pete Buttigieg in early March 2020.....	114

## **Chapter One—Introduction**

By most accounts, Jimmy Carter is a better man than he was a president.<sup>1</sup> His work at the Carter Center and in his post presidential life have far exceeded the tangible successes of his presidency. The historical process through which presidents are reviewed and evaluated is often slow and tedious. Few presidential records are released following their exit from official office and complete, though redacted, records not made available until after their passing. Reputations of presidents are ever-changing, and historians are only beginning to look at the long-term effects of the Carter presidency. In recent years, Carter has experienced a revitalization in his legacy. As the public becomes farther removed from Carter leaving office in 1981, a more favorable light falls on the former president. The Carter presidency itself becomes a point of nostalgia.

Presidents have been a long-standing fascination of the general public and presidential homesites provide a physical connection to these leaders of the United States. The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site does just that. Located prominently in Plains, Georgia, the site portrays each of the important periods of Carter's life from childhood through present day. A town that was once a simple stop over site for farm owners has now become a national historic site, illustrating an important piece of American cultural heritage. Owned and operated by the National Park Service, the interpretation strategy employed at this site takes the safe and uncontroversial approach, depicting Jimmy Carter as a normal, everyday person. Here through

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaub, Michael. "‘His Very Best’ Calls Jimmy Carter ‘Perhaps The Most Misunderstood President’." NPR, September 29, 2020.

this interpretation, he is to be seen as someone who happened to become president through his hard work and determination and is meant to be the standard for model citizenship.

### *Methodology*

This thesis answers the research question through a utilization of both primary and secondary sources as well as the use of archival records. First, a literature review was conducted to establish a basis of understanding concerning the development of an interpretation plan according to the National Park Service standards, specifically through the ideas of prominent leader in the field of interpretation Freeman Tilden. In addition, this review looked at the scholarly work surrounding the formation of presidential legacies and commemoration at presidential sites as well as the ideas of collective and public memory.

Research was be conducted concerning the background of Jimmy Carter, expressly regarding his adolescence in Plains, his rise in politics through the governorship, the election of 1976 and his presidential policies, the loss of the 1980 election and the work that he has done since leaving office. Biographies written by Kenneth Morris (*Jimmy Carter, American Moralist*) and Peter Bourne (*Jimmy Carter: a Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency*) will be drawn upon heavily. Additionally, pieces written by Carter himself, such as *Why Not the Best? the First Fifty Years*, are used to provide first-hand accounts of his life.

National Park Service foundation documents, as well as the site's nomination form to the National Register of Historic Places, will be analyzed in order to understand, and be able to evaluate, the proposed interpretation plan and the significant points for the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site as determined by this organization. A site visit was conducted to the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site (JCNHS) in Plains, Georgia, to understand visitor

experience at the site. Aspects such as the architecture, the presentation of the interior, exhibits, tours, and interpretative tools will be evaluated at each of the buildings on the site (Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home, Plains High School, and the Train Depot for the 1976 Election Headquarters) as to the narrative they are portraying and how it aligns with the foundation documents. This thesis will also pay particular focus to the ranch house where Mr. and Mrs. Carter live currently and how that interpretation will change once the Carters pass. Ideas such as nostalgia for the past and one's childhood will also be examined as to how that adds to Carter's non-partisan portrayal at the site.

As part of the conclusion, the legacy of Jimmy Carter is placed in the context of the American political climate in 2021. Carter will also be analyzed for how his involvement in the formation of his historic site affected the interpretation and the presentation of his life, how this is breaking from the pre-established mold, and what it means in a post-Trump world.

### *Limitations*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were some limitations in this research. Interviews with Beth Moore, Chief of Interpretation at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Park, were done via Microsoft Teams. Plains High School is closed to the public as COVID cases in Plains are too high to allow visitation based on CDC guidelines. Due to this, I was given a private tour of the high school by park ranger Jacob Ross.

## **Nostalgia**

The use of nostalgia is prominent in the interpretation style at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. Nostalgia lacks an empirically characterized definition, though it has long been a part of the study of memory. The term “nostalgia” derives from the Greek, *nostos* meaning to return home and *algos* meaning the personification of both physical and mental pain. The word has evolved in understanding over time. Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, and Wildschut describe modern nostalgia as “a complex emotion that involves past-oriented cognition and a mixed affective signature. The emotion is often triggered by encountering a familiar smell, sound, or keepsake, by engaging in conversations, or by feeling lonely.”<sup>2</sup> Further, the authors specify nostalgia as viewing memory through typically happy emotions. When talking about historic sites specifically, the authors found that, when feeling and engaging with nostalgia, participants reported a distinct feeling of belonging and sentimentality.<sup>3</sup>

There is a link that has been formed between nostalgia and the tourism industry. Graham Dann suggests that tourism has employed nostalgia for its own economic advantage.<sup>4</sup> Dann notes that nostalgia is grounded in longing for the past that is specifically exploited in hotels and museums. This commodification of emotion has increasingly been used in the interpretation of historic sites. The use of nostalgia has the power to effect how visitors perceive a historic site,

---

<sup>2</sup> Hepper, Erica & Ritchie, Timothy & Sedikides, Constantine & Wildschut, Tim. *Odyssey's End: Lay Conceptions of Nostalgia Reflect Its Original Homeric Meaning*. 2011

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Dann, G.M.S. cited in Theobald, William F. *Global Tourism: the next Decade*. Guildford: Butterworth Hein, 1994.

shaping their view on the person or event of commemoration. Here, with nostalgia being rooted in pleasant, satisfactory feelings, it can transform what would once be a problematic historic site to a positively viewed person and place.<sup>5</sup>

### **Birthplaces**

Almost simultaneously with the beginning of the commemoration of historic sites in the United States came the creation of birthplace monuments. Most of these interpretative sites have come into existence in the last century, coinciding with a strong rise in patriotism and nationalism that came with fighting in two world wars. Seth Bruggeman clearly sets forth his intentions for his book, *Born in the U.S.A.: Birth, Commemoration and American Public Memory*, in his introduction--“identify what is at stake and who is at play in the politics of remembering birth.”<sup>6</sup> With contributions from a number of historians and specialists, the book is an attempt to define why it is that Americans care about birthplaces in the first place as well as the “reinvention of origin myths” at these sites. These origin myths still play a vital role in the American political system and allows us to provide meaning to these figures that most people will only encounter in the pages of textbook--“the birthplace endures as a contested site for the performance, rather than the experience of authenticity.”<sup>7</sup> To this end, most of the contributors argue that visitors engage with birthplaces as a part of heritage tourism, providing them with a

---

<sup>5</sup> For a greater discussion on the use of nostalgia, see *Globalized Nostalgia: Tourism, Heritage and the Politics of Place* by Christina M. Ceisel and *Memory Tourism and the Commodification of Nostalgia* by Roberta Bartoletti

<sup>6</sup> Bruggeman, Seth C. *Born in the U.S.A: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*, page 5

<sup>7</sup> Bruggeman, page 68

connection to the cultural past as well as hope for the future. The examples presented in this book range from presidents to conservationists to poets to show that this issue of birthplaces does not only affect those in the highest positions, and it does, in fact, permeate general American culture.<sup>8</sup>

### **Collective Memory**

How we remember certain people, places or events from our history is especially important in the interpretation of historic sites. Collective public memory is vital to the understanding of our history, especially for events that occurred long before anyone alive today was born or could remember it for themselves. Historian John Bodnar defines collective public memory as:

body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and by implication, its future. It is fashioned ideally in a public sphere in which various parts of the social structure exchange views. The major focus of this communicative and cognitive process is not the past, however, but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power and the question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the commemoration of presidential birthplaces, see: *Living the Past* by Beth Goodacre, *Here George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture and the Public History of a National Monument* by Seth Bruggeman, *Where the Presidents Were Born: The History and Preservation of Presidential Birthplaces* by Louis L. Picone, *Presidents Birthplaces, Homes, and Burial Sites* by Rachel Kochmann

<sup>9</sup> Bodnar, John E. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Page 15



Bodnar theorizes that government officials and others in positions of authority have been trying, sometimes successfully, to direct these commemorative measures to advance the interests of the nation. He traces the evolution of these public memory sites from the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 through the construction of the Vietnam War Memorial in the early 1980s. He places the government as the most defining factor of collective memory as a whole in the United States, coalescing in the period directly after the end of the Civil War. Bodnar has a general survey of a number of commemorative events across the country, each eventually connecting back to the history of the National Park Service and the role the organization plays in the presentation of public memory. His argument, though, is the disagreement between “ordinary people” and the “middle class bureaucrats” over historic symbolism and commemoration, boiling the issue down to local or vernacular history versus national history. This struggle between ideals is one that is clearly portrayed at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, comparing the significance of Plains on its own as a characteristically rural southern Depression-era town and the knowledge that this town produced a politician that was able to make it to the White House. These historic sites, according to Bodnar, have the power to shape how we view the people and events that surround them. Not only do they preserve the past, but they also address political issues of the present. He argues that historic sites similar to that of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site can be seen as a representative site, meaning that it not only intends to show the importance of the person who lived there but to also show a way of life that was typical of a given place at a particular moment in the past. Collective memory refers to how groups of people

remember the past. If an entire group sees a person or event in a positive manner, then it will likely translate into a positive portrayal on these historic sites.<sup>10</sup>

### **One Term Presidents and their Legacy**

To date, academic literature on the legacy of one term presidents is rather scarce, as ranking presidents is inherently subjective in nature. One term presidents are often relegated to the bottom of the ranking, regularly ranking in the lower half of the presidents and no single term president being listed in the top ten.<sup>11</sup>

Michael P. Cullinane and Sylvia Ellis, in *Constructing Presidential Legacy: How We Remember the American President*, compile a number of essays to answer the titular question. Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963, there was a proliferation of presidential sites and monuments across the United States, a quick attempt to memorialize the men who were potentially willing to die for their position. Franklin D. Roosevelt had already started his presidential library in the 1930s, which changed how the influence of a self-commemoration strategy changed how we, as the general public, view and understand the executive branch. According to the authors, presidential sites “help former presidents rise above partisanship, enhancing their reputations.”<sup>12</sup> A considerable portion of the book is dedicated to how presidential legacies are formed by figures inside the White House, including by the

---

<sup>10</sup> For a greater discussion on the creation of collective and public memory, see: *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth Century America* by Barry Schwartz, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory* by Benjamin Hofbauer, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* by David Glassberg or, for opposing opinions, compare *Civil Religion* by Robert M. Bellah and *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* by Marcela Cristi

<sup>11</sup> Kelly, Jon. “George HW Bush: What Makes a One-Term President?” *BBC News*, 2 Dec. 2018

<sup>12</sup> Cullinane, Michael Patrick, and Sylvia Ellis. *Constructing Presidential Legacy: How We Remember the American President*; page 21

Presidents themselves. Rhetoric of presidents both in the office at the time and of the past have an extensive effect on how a president is viewed by the general public. Few single term presidents cause any kind of emotion on either side of the aisle. The usual reasoning for this “effect” is that they simply did not have the time to enact meaningful legislation, causing them to fade into relative obscurity in the grand scope of public memory. The second term of a president is generally referred to be historians as the period of legacy building. Without that second term in hand, it is likely up to government organizations and their historical sites to determine the overall legacy of that person as a president. Specifically, it is stated the Jimmy Carter is the first president to morph his presidential library into a humanitarian center which has vastly helped rebuild his public image. It was argued that this action was the single greatest step that Carter could have taken in order to gain a better perception. The authors also argue that a large part of our perception of the president and the office of the presidency is influenced directly by advertising and marketing strategies, especially in an increasingly online world.<sup>13</sup> Some one-termers we remember and most we forget; each still provide an important role in American public memory.

Nostalgia, birthplaces, collective memory and the legacy of one term president each play a role in the public persona of former president Jimmy Carter. This persona is essential to the interpretation strategy that is employed at his homesite. This thesis explores these factors in relationship as to how they play a role in the interpretation of Carter’s life, specifically his non-partisanship (or lack thereof), at his historic site in Plains, Georgia.

---

<sup>13</sup> For a greater discussion on the legacy of one term presidents, see *Presidential Performance* by Max Skidmore, *The Forgotten Presidents: Their Untold Constitutional Legacy* by Michael J. Gerhardt, *Where They Stand: The American Presidents in the Eyes of Voters and Historians* by Robert Merry, and *The End of Greatness: Why America Can’t Have (and Doesn’t Want) Another Great President* by Aaron David Miller.

### *Research Question*

This work answers the question “At his historic site, how does the interpretation portray a distinctly partisan Jimmy Carter, accurately presenting the man as a whole, in a hyper-partisan political environment?” To answer this question, a number of sub-questions must also be answered:

1. What is the interpretation at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site?
2. What circumstances affect interpretation at this site?
3. How does the site handle commemorating a living president?
4. What is the relationship between interpretation and public memory at this site?

### *Organization*

This work aims to address the extent to which the Jimmy Carter National Historic Park portrays Carter, a distinctively partisan person, as a non-partisan figure. Chapter 2 will look into the history of the preservation movement, beginning in the 1850s, and the preservation of presidential sites. The construction of a presidential legacy and how that is portrayed at a historic site is paid considerable attention. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s creation of the first presidential library will also be considered as to how it shifts the commemoration of American presidents. Next, the chapter will speak on the legislation surrounding historic presidential sites and how they are created and managed. Finally, the chapter will introduce interpretation theory and its development into interpretation plans through the works of Freedman Tilden and other prominent theorists. In addition, there is a discussion on the presentation of a domestic space as a tourist attraction.

Chapter 3 focuses on Jimmy Carter the man. To fully understand the interpretation at his historic site, Carter's life must first be presented. The chapter examines his life beginning in his childhood in Plains, through his education and marriage, his entrance into politics, presidency and his life today. Specific attention is paid to the gubernatorial elections of 1966 and 1970, and the presidential elections of 1976 and 1980 with a discussion of how Carter established himself as a political figure and how that effects his non-partisan interpretation.

Chapter 4 analyzes the interpretation at the Park and the work that the site does to make a political figure at least palatable to people on both sides of the aisle. A discussion of the foundation documents will be included to form a basis of what narrative the site is aiming to portray to its visitors. Each piece of the site (the high school, the boyhood home and the train depot), as well as Plains as a whole, will be analyzed as to how they fit within that narrative and how they facilitate a non-partisan interpretation of Jimmy Carter.

Chapter 5 summarizes the role of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Park in the public perception of Jimmy Carter. The chapter will discuss the effect of Jimmy Carter's personal intervention in the interpretation of the site on the overall perception of the site. The importance of the site in the modern political and cultural scene will also be explored.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter which includes research conclusions and an analysis of the Carter legacy.

## **Chapter Two: Preservation of Presidential Sites, the Construction of a Presidential Legacy, and the Formation of an Interpretation Plan**

“A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but by the men it honors.”  
--John F. Kennedy

### **Presidential Sites as Domestic Spaces**

Presidential sites, as a whole, are social constructs, a hybrid of sacred and domestic space where the man is presented. The phenomenon of a house museum is not a new one, with the first even being designated in 1850. It is the presentation of a person's life as a tourist attraction, a rare glimpse into the life that so few of us will achieve during our lifetime. These sites must balance between putting the president in both a personal context and a historical context, showing both the public and the private sides of their life. The incorporation of the domestic life of the president obliges a visitor to see their leader as a human being outside of their position. A majority of these sites include a house museum, and they must be able to play into collective memory in order to be successful. According to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is about a shared experience rather than being focused on the individual. Not only does the site have to portray the life of the president at hand but it also must portray a particular moment in time that a visitor can relate to.

There is an undeniable connection between our sense of history and our sense of place. At presidential sites, it may seem as if the visitor is invading a private space when exploring the homes. On the contrary, being able to evaluate a president's personal space allows for them to become more three-dimensional character than a history book would allow. The complexity of the position and the effects on its holder can more provocatively be displayed in these homes.

These spaces serve as the backdrop through which the lives and overall work of the president is interpreted.

### History of the Preservation of Presidential Sites

As historian H.W. Brands said, the President of the United States was not meant to be the great figure of American politics—it was supposed to be Congress. He argues that Americans devote far too much attention to their presidents and that the existence of presidential historic sites enable their excess.<sup>14</sup> Worship of the Presidents is not a new phenomenon. Presidential homes, like Mount Vernon and Monticello, remain some of the most visited historic sites every year in the United States. The history of presidential sites, though, is not simply a matter of preservation but also a matter of social history. The desire of the public to commemorate presidential sites is a direct reflection of the social matters of the time. As any living presence of the Revolutionary era began to disappear in the latter part of the first half of the nineteenth century, an inclination began to appear to memorialize the men of this period to tell their story for future generations. The major symbols of American public memory at the time coincided with the Revolutionary War and the country wished to memorialize these symbols to, in some way, guarantee that this new nation would survive past its infancy. Reverence for this new democratic system was a must and, given that George Washington was immortalized as an American god even, it was inevitable that he was the first president to begin to have sites associated with him and his career be commemorated at historic sites. National memory came to be connected with these presidential homesites. The rise of the “imperial presidency” and the increased power associated with the position allowed for presidential sites to multiply across the

---

<sup>14</sup> Cullinane, page 278

country. There was a significant shift in loyalty from the regal King George III to Washington, more specifically the presidency, and, as John Bodnar argues, this began the idolization and worship of the position by the public.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, the first site to be acquired for historic preservation purposes had the first president's name attached to it. The Hasbrouck House in Newburgh, New York (today known as Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site) was purchased by the state of New York in 1850 and became the first publicly operated historic site in the country.<sup>16</sup> The most notable beginning of the preservation of presidential sites came a few years later, still with the mission of saving the collective memory of George Washington. Following his death in 1799, Washington's home had become dilapidated. Louise Dalton Bird Cunningham remarked that "if the men of America have seen fit to allow the home of its most respected hero go to ruin, why can't the women of America band together to save it."<sup>17</sup> It was her daughter, Ann Pamela Cunningham, who would make this sentiment a reality. From this idea, Cunningham founded the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) in 1853, the first nationwide women's association and the first private preservation organization. At first, it proved difficult to convince the state or the federal government to acquire a piece of private property with public funds, as it was seen at the time as a misuse of power. Through various fundraising events and private donations, the MVLA was able to acquire \$200,000 (about \$5.7 million today) to purchase the land and house themselves from the Washington descendants, and the organization still owns the property today.

---

<sup>15</sup> Bodnar page 33-34

<sup>16</sup> Coleman, Laurence Vail. *Historic House Museums*. Page 18

<sup>17</sup> "Mount Vernon Ladies' Association." *George Washington's Mount Vernon*



These efforts by the MVLA began a national movement concerning historic preservation. Since 1858, twenty-nine similarly based preservation organizations have been established by “hometown friends” of the Presidents. Though the intentions were there, presidential sites were still not in the forefront of any preservationists’ mind at the time. The country was entering into a period of civil war and unrest as well a number of unmemorable presidents. The preservation of presidential sites was not a priority for the latter half on the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Prior to World War I, public memory was very fragmented as political power was decentralized and was focused within local communities. The resurgence of the Lost Cause narrative in the 1920s, paired with the patriotism of the post-World War I era, saw an increased interest in the cultivation of public memory. As the number of Civil War veterans decreased, there was once again a vested interest in the commemoration of these sites and these people. This increase in the intrigue of collective memory was not only seen by Confederate sympathizers, but also by Union supporters. The Civil War had brought about a new form of nationalism that historian Merle Curti described as “celebrated the nation as the highest form of human association”, thus the political leaders embodied this unity as a country.<sup>18</sup>

The substantial rise in presidential sites after the 1930s directly correlates to the rise in executive power and authority of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, dubbed by historian Arthur Schlesinger as “The Imperial Presidency” (roughly between 1930-1990). The rise in the power of the federal government taken through the Great Depression and World War II remained and became a commonplace, almost a necessity, in the eyes of the American public. Bodnar remarked on this idea by saying, “indeed it was the unregulated nature of both political and cultural conflict that helped explain the rising power of the nation state in the twentieth century and its ability to

---

<sup>18</sup> Curti, Merle, *The Roots of American Loyalty* page 170

dominate collective memory.”<sup>19</sup> This imperial phenomenon is defined by former president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Presiding over two of the most catastrophic events in American history in the Great Depression and the Second World War, Roosevelt had garnered more executive power than any man who had come before him. As such, he wanted to have a memorial to his presidency that matched his newfound power. In the same manner, Roosevelt had created an unprecedented level of intimacy with the American people with his “Fireside Chats”, provoking the people to want to remember him. Even though Roosevelt passed away before the end of his presidency, he had already begun to plan how he wanted to be remembered, noting that “man’s desire to be remembered is colossal.”<sup>20</sup>

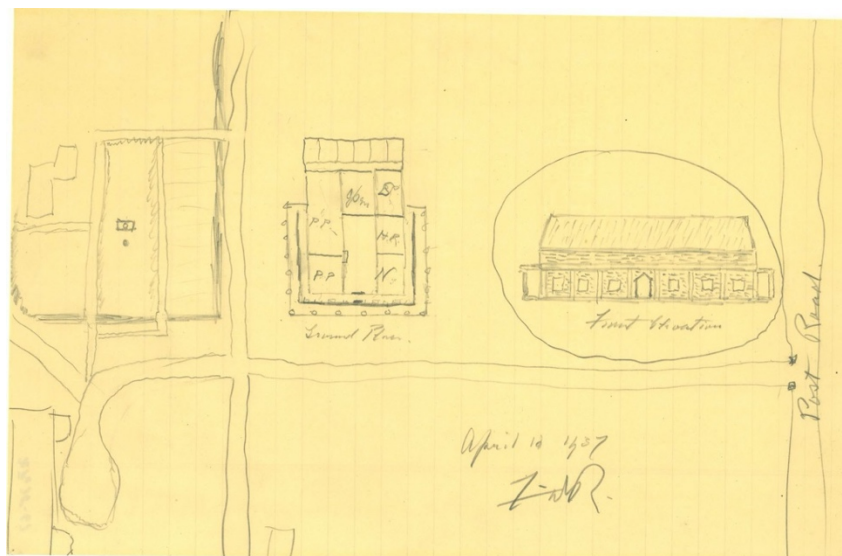


Figure 1. Franklin Roosevelt’s original plan for his library, 1937

---

<sup>19</sup> Bodnar page 38

<sup>20</sup> Hofbauer, Benjamin, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*, page 24

To this end, Roosevelt created the presidential library as we know it today. Roosevelt established this monument to his presidency on his birth site in Hyde Park, New York. He donated all of his papers as property of the people. The day after FDR announced his plans for the library, the New York Times ran an article headlined “Roosevelt Estate to House Archives, Go to Public Later” with the sub-headline reading “Historians Back Idea”.<sup>21</sup> Though not all reviews were positive, the library continued as a tangible form of collective memory, one of the first of its kind in the United States. The Roosevelt Library was meant to preserve and display every conceivable piece of the life of Franklin, presidency or otherwise. Roosevelt established a precedent that every president after him (and even Herbert Hoover before him) would continue. Each started to take an active look into the legacy of their presidency and how they were remembered, if they were to be remembered at all.

With the beginning of the presidential library, every president, not merely the exceptional, has a national historic site, even as simple or basic as a monument. Additionally, in the 1940s, there is a shift from the “classic” (an abstract/representative monument such as the Washington Monument) to the “catholic” (the physical objects themselves are becoming the relics) modes of commemoration.<sup>22</sup> Simple, everyday objects that were used by a president suddenly became an artifact worthy of preservation. Hofbauer expands on this point, saying “objects used by a president become relics and are stored and displayed in a federal facility that affirms a heroism that is already accepted. In other words, the touch of a president potentially

---

<sup>21</sup> New York Times, 11 December 1938

<sup>22</sup> Hofbauer page 35

transforms any object into a relic...”<sup>23</sup> Presidential monuments of the past (obelisks, classical temples) are replaced with presidential libraries and the sanctification of presidential homes.

This shift in commemoration was paired with an intense period of nationalism and patriotism that came in the period directly after the end of World War II. This rise in nationalistic feelings led to major changes in the approach to the idea of heritage. Hofbauer writes of this time, “On the most fundamental level, much of presidential commemoration in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are an assertion of ego and power.”<sup>24</sup> The United States had emerged from World War II as one of the most powerful countries in the world and these historic sites were to reflect that notion. Commemoration at these sites turned from simply presenting the facts and history to the visitor to forming a connection with the past for the public, expanding upon American nationalism for future generations.

According to John Bodnar, the 1950s and early 1960s saw an equilibrium point among the social issues of the time and there came to be “an agreement that the nation-state must be defended and supported.”<sup>25</sup> The public desire for unity fueled the creation of presidential memorials over the next sixty years to the present day.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. page 7

<sup>25</sup> Bodnar page 37

## Legislation

A number of federal legislative actions further cement this idea into the public sphere. As previously mentioned, the MVLA heralded the first historic preservation of a site, though these kinds of actions eventually began to move from the private sphere to public sphere. The creation of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916 laid the foundation for this transition. Signed by Woodrow Wilson, the National Park Service Organic Act (16 U.S.C. §1.) established the agency as a branch of the Department of the Interior. It expressly gives the NPS the authority to:

promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.<sup>26</sup>

The enactment of the Historic Sites Act (1935) transferred control of historic sites and monuments to the National Park Service, paying specific attention to sites and structures concerning commemoration of former presidents. This act set out a philosophy for historic preservation in this country and it is one of the earliest pieces of legislation to do this. Section §309101 gave the agency the power to “conduct a survey of sites that the Secretary considers exhibit qualities most appropriate for the commemoration of each former president including sites associated with the deeds, leadership or lifework of a former president” as well as the authority to “establish a site or structure as a national historic site.”<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> National Park Service Organic Act (1916), 16 U.S.C. §1.

<sup>27</sup> Historic Sites Act (1935), 54 USC 309101

The backbone of historic preservation in the United States today was formed through the landmark passing of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). The NHPA provided the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places, which gave greater protection to historic sites across the country. With the passing of this legislation, there was a greater incentive for presidents to add their specific sites to the Register.

Relating specifically to the Presidents, the Presidential Records Act was passed in 1978, under the Carter administration. This legislation changed the legal ownership of the official records of the President from the private sector to the general population. Notably, it also states that the President must acquire approval from the Archivist of the United States before disposing of any records.<sup>28</sup> The passing of this legislation allowed for presidential sites to be able to display more tangible material culture concerning the presidency than had been allowed previously.

### Construction of a Presidential Legacy

Michael Culliane asserts that “building a legacy requires buy in from those who lived through presidential terms of service, as well as later generations.”<sup>29</sup> What we think about the presidents who have served this country is never final and is always changing. What history remembers about a particular president is often unpredictable and not under the control of the men who held the position. That does not mean, though, that a president won’t try. Hofbauer reiterates this sentiment by stating “Most presidents, even if they would not phrase it in this way, hope to find a place from themselves in what has been called the civil religion of the United

---

<sup>28</sup> Presidential Records Act (1978) 44 U.S.C. §§ 2201–2207

<sup>29</sup> Culliane, page 2

States.”<sup>30</sup> Systematically, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln and George Washington consistently make up the top of the list while James Buchanan, Franklin Pierce and Andrew Johnson frequent the bottom. A presidential second term is often seen as their “legacy building” term. They are without the pressure of running for reelection, due to term limits, and securing a second term is one way to cement themselves in the dynasty of “great” presidents. Only one single-term president appears in the top 15 presidential rankings (it was James K. Polk, who simply refused to run for a second term), according to C-SPAN’s survey of presidential historians in 2017.<sup>31</sup> Those surveyed include professors from nearly every state in the country, historians, lawyers, journalists and a member of the White House Historical Association. Though complete objectivity in these rankings is nearly impossible, David McCollough offers his argument that presidential character and legacy is defined by how one handles their “failure”, though the concept of a one term president as a failure is a “distinctly modern thought.”<sup>32</sup> The expansion of technology, namely in that of the radio and television, allowed for a much greater intimacy between the president and the people to be formed that was not seen for 19<sup>th</sup> century presidents. Being able to hear the voice of the president and see them outside of pictures in newspapers, people in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century formed a more significant connection to the president. The more time that a president can spend in the public eye, the greater chance they have to be remembered by the public. Having a second term has become almost an expectation

---

<sup>30</sup> Hofbauer, page 5

<sup>31</sup> “Total Scores/Overall Rankings: C-SPAN Survey on Presidents 2017.” *Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network*

<sup>32</sup> David McCollough, *Character Above All*, PBS Broadcast Transcript, May 29, 1996

for those who hold the office and if one fails to reach this feat, then, to the public, their legacy has been diminished.

Much of presidential decision making can find its roots in the leader's innate desire to achieve a positive legacy. Authors and historians such as Moe (1993), Cameron (2000) and Nelson (2000), largely define presidential legacy as "a president's place in history".<sup>33</sup> The determinates of presidential legacy, though, have yet to be conclusively found by historians. Vidal Romero defined his factors as administration duration, a president's publications before their tenure, number of war years, capacity to reform the institutions, failed assassination attempts and corruption/scandals.<sup>34</sup> While these factors were used to grade the legacies of Mexican presidents, it seems as if these are some of the prevailing factors (excluding previous publications) that historians, as well as the American public, take into consideration when remembering their presidents.

It is certainly true that these factors, among others as well, of a presidential legacy are examined at each historic site when determining what to present to the public. Jodi Kanter, professor at George Washington University, describes presidential legacy as something that is performed at these historic sites. She analyzes this performance of sorts in three distinct scripts. First is the historical script, describing what the president *actually* did, analyzing their successes

---

<sup>33</sup> Moe, Terry. "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory." In *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*. 1993

Cameron, Charles M. *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*. 2000  
Nelson, Michael. "Evaluating the Presidency." In *The Presidency and the Political System*, 1–23. 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Romero, Vidal. "Of Love and Hate: Understanding the Determinants of Presidential Legacies."



and their failures. Kanter states that this is the most difficult script to determine since the majority of the information that the public receives about a president is highly vetted and mediated. Second is the representational script, which fills in the “holes” that are left by this vetted history and is described as a “necessary fiction” to visitors to make the site more meaningful and impactful. This script is the design and presentation of the historical script to the visitor of the site. Lastly is the cultural script which is the expectations that Americans place on their president on how they are supposed to perform during their tenure. As a whole, Kanter concludes the American presidential sites are public performances of not only presidential character but American ideals as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

Presidential historic sites are meant to portray American exceptionalism. Even if the president themselves may not be remembered positively, their legacy will almost always be portrayed with a positive undertone at these sites.

#### Formation of an Interpretation Plan

Once the presidential historic site is owned by the National Park Service (generally through legislative action or donation from the president themselves) and a presidential legacy is formed, to some extent at least, it is then necessary to form an interpretation plan. This interpretation plan is a physical depiction of the representational script of presidential sites that Kanter had described.

---

<sup>35</sup> Kanter, Jodi, *Presidential Libraries as Performance* page 6-7

## Definition of Interpretation

The definition of interpretation is often disagreed upon; everchanging and each organization creates their own definition of the term. According to the National Park Service, successful interpretation is defined as:

facilitating a connection between the interests of the visitor and the meanings of the resource. Interpretation is 1) successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the resource; and 2) appropriate for the audience and provides clear focus for their connection with the resources by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas, rather than relying primarily on a recital of a chronological narrative or series of facts.<sup>36</sup>

Freeman Tilden's definition of interpretation is "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."<sup>37</sup> On a similar note, former NPS Park Ranger William Lewis simply defines interpretation as "the interface between the historic site and those who visit it."<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, there are some who believe that interpretation can simply not be defined. Larry Beck and Ted Cable, both contributors to the *Journal of Interpretation Research*, have stated that "we have been working with the concept of interpretation for 25 years and have had some ideas and have written some definitions and principles, yet we still don't fully know what interpretation is."<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> "Foundations of Interpretation" *National Park Service*

<sup>37</sup> "Defining Interpretation" National Association for Interpretation

<sup>38</sup> Lewis, William J., *Interpreting for Park Visitors* page 16

<sup>39</sup> Beck, Larry and Ted Cable "The Meaning of Interpretation" page 7

With these definitions in mind, there are commonalities that arise between them. Namely, it is that interpretation must form a connection between the site and the visitor that is greater than relaying information that can be found elsewhere.

### Freeman Tilden

The concept of the interpretation plan for the National Park Service is directly influenced by the writings of journalist Freeman Tilden. Tilden was tasked specifically by Newton Drury, then Director of the National Park Service, to document the “essentials” of interpretation at a historic site. As a result, his 1957 book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, was created and is considered to be the definitive texts in terms of interpretation planning and education. Tilden defined his six principles of interpretation as:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Tilden, Freeman, *Interpreting Our Heritage*

Through this piece of work came Tilden's mantra "through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection", considered the cornerstone for interpretation, especially that of the National Park Service. Acknowledged through later editions of his book, Tilden stated, though, that it was inevitable that his principles would have to evolve over time, as all disciplines eventually encounter. He stated that, "*Interpreting Our Heritage* is not the final word, as the author and his associates would be the first to admit."<sup>41</sup> As he is considered to be the "Grandfather of Interpretation", critiques of his work, though, are limited and his ideas remain the standard. Most modern interpretation theory is an expansion upon Tilden's original ideas. Jessica Foy Donnelly, as well as Larry Beck and Ted Cable, bring the ideals of Tilden into the modern century.<sup>42</sup>

### The Plan

Required by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, the National Park Service must create a plan for interpretation at each of the sites under their control. The interpretation plan must have a number of facets in order to succeed. Historian William Alderson states that "for true understanding more is required than the communication of factual information."<sup>43</sup> The goal for all historic sites is for the visitor to be able to gain a greater understanding of the purpose behind the site, why it is important to the community/state/nation and why it should be important to them. The NPS states that there are seven aspects to the foundation of an interpretation plan—

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Donnelly, Jessica Foy, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*; Beck, Larry and Ted Cable, *Interpretation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

<sup>43</sup> Alderson, William, *Interpretation of Historic Sites* page 3

1.) purpose and significance, 2.) themes, 3.) management goals, 4.) desired visitor experience, 5.) issues and influences affecting interpretation, 6.) visitor profiles, and 7.) existing interpretive conditions.<sup>44</sup> The methods through which a site achieves these aspects have changed with technological advances and often vary depending on the site. As an overarching goal, through the interpretation plan, the site wants to encourage dialogue from its visitors, a direct link back to Tilden's principles.<sup>45</sup> The nuances of the interpretation plan and how it relates specifically to the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site will be discussed in a later chapter.

---

<sup>44</sup> "Comprehensive Interpretive Planning" National Park Service page 8-9

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Management Policies 2006

### **Chapter Three: Jimmy Carter, the White Liberal Southerner**

Throughout Jimmy Carter's political career and life, he has never defined himself under a singular identity. He described himself saying "I am a Southerner and an American. I am a farmer, an engineer, a father and a husband, a Christian, a politician, and a former governor, a planner, a businessman, a nuclear physicist, a naval officer, a canoeist, and among other things a lover of Bob Dylan's songs and Dylan Thomas's poetry."<sup>46</sup> This allowed him to remain multi-faceted, rather a mystery to colleagues and the public alike. It has become increasingly difficult to pinpoint his exact beliefs, thus allowing him to enter into a non-partisan arena unlike any of his contemporaries. Was this on purpose? Does this notion add to his portrayal at his own historic site? This definition of Carter begins with his birth in the small southwestern town of Plains, Georgia.

#### *Childhood*

James Earl Carter, Jr. was born on October 1, 1924 at the Wise Sanitarium, where his mother worked as a nurse. He was the first president to be born in a hospital.<sup>47</sup> He was the first child born to Lillian Gordy and James Earl Carter Sr. Three younger siblings (Gloria, Ruth and Billy) would follow over the next decade. His family moved across Plains multiple times before

---

<sup>46</sup> Morris, Kenneth Earl. *Jimmy Carter, American Moralist*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Page 53

<sup>47</sup> "Jimmy Carter National Historic Site (U.S. National Park Service)." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior.

purchasing a permanent home in 1928, just outside of Plains in Archery, Georgia. The home was without electricity until 1938 with the addition of running water coming the same year.



*Figure 2. Earl and Lillian Carter*

(courtesy of the Library of Congress)

The Carter Family, though, was hardly poor as Earl Carter had a net worth of about \$250,000 (just under \$4 million today).<sup>48</sup> Earl Carter was known as an extremely frugal man and the children performed tasks that had them involved in the day-to-day activities of the house. Jimmy would later refer to his father as the person who most shaped his ambitions and work ethic.<sup>49</sup> The Carter family did not live differently from the other families in the area. Carter said of his childhood “the early years of my life on the farm were full and enjoyable, isolated but not

---

<sup>48</sup> Morris page 29-30

<sup>49</sup> Ibid page 66.

lonely. We always had enough to eat, no economic hardship, but no money to waste. We felt close to nature, close to members of our family and close to God.”<sup>50</sup>

Living in Archery provided Carter with a biracial society that was not common in the South in the 1920s and 1930s. The Carters were one of two white families in a predominately African American community. Jimmy Carter often played with his Black neighbors in addition to being cared for by Rachel Clarke, an African American tenant farmer who lived on his family’s property. Earl Carter was an ardent segregationist; Lillian Carter supported racial equality and integration.<sup>51</sup> Carter had to be able to balance both points of views from an early age, supporting an idea that would be seen in his later political campaigns.

He entered Plains High School in 1937. It is here that Jimmy Carter would interact with superintendent and English teacher Julia Coleman.<sup>52</sup> Coleman made an effort to encourage Carter to expand his education, exposing him and his classmates to subjects that were often not available to rural schools such as art and literature. Carter graduated in 1941, continuing his education at Georgia Southwestern College in Americus, Georgia. After one year, he transferred to the Georgia Institute of Technology, beginning coursework in mathematics. Further, Carter would transfer again to the United States Naval Academy in 1943, graduating under an accelerated wartime program in 1946.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Jimmy Carter National Historic Site (U.S. National Park Service).” National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>51</sup> Morris page 32

<sup>52</sup> “Julia Coleman.” National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>53</sup> “Notable Graduates-- James Earl Carter, Jr.” The U.S. Naval Academy. Accessed January 2021.



While at the Academy, Carter married Eleanor Rosalynn Smith, a close family friend of his sister Ruth, when he was just 21 and she was 18 (see *Figure 3*). Rosalynn had also attended Plains High School, graduating salutatorian in 1944. The couple would have four children together John William (b. 1947), James Earl III “Chip” (b. 1950), Donnel Jeffrey (b. 1952) and Amy Lynn (b. 1967).



*Figure 3.* The Carters on their Wedding Day, July 1946

(courtesy of the Library of Congress)

The couple spent the first years of their marriage in various parts of the country due to Jimmy’s naval appointments. While in the Navy, his major work surrounded the operation of submarines, serving aboard the *USS Pomfret*. Lieutenant Carter worked under the command of Captain Hyman Rickover, who proved to be one of the defining influences of his life other than

his family. Rickover ran an efficient nuclear submarine program with what Carter's biographer has called "justifiable faith in his own immense intellectual capability and an insatiable appetite for hard work. He had an unswerving view that his decisions were inherently correct and in the best interest of the country."<sup>54</sup> It is this naval experience that Carter would use in his campaign. The criticism of stubbornness and intense personal morality that characterized Rickover would face Carter as well both during and after his presidency.

With Earl Carter's death in July 1953 from pancreatic cancer, Jimmy Carter was honorably discharged from the military in October of that year. The family moved their life back to Plains.<sup>55</sup> Earl Carter had recently been elected to the Georgia House of Representatives, though his business had fallen into debt in the meantime. This debt was then taken on by the eldest Carter son. As a result, Jimmy and his family qualified for and moved into government subsidized housing, the only president to do so.<sup>56</sup> While the situation arose more out of the housing situation in Plains rather than inherent need, he used this period of his life to form connections with a wider segment of the American population in his later political campaigns.

---

<sup>54</sup> Bourne, Peter G. *Jimmy Carter: a Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency*. 1997. Page 77

<sup>55</sup> Ibid page 80

<sup>56</sup> Morris page 115

## *Pre-Presidency*

Carter was a Southern Democrat in an increasingly Republican area. Previously, he openly supported Harry Truman in 1948, when 40% of his peers voted for Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond.<sup>57</sup> When Carter entered the Georgia state senate in 1963, the Civil Rights movement divided the nation. Sumter County and nearby Americus had become embroiled in a bitter race battle over segregation, characteristic of what was occurring across the country during this time.<sup>58</sup> For south Georgia white Democrats, President John F. Kennedy characterized the opposition within the party. Though Kennedy had not outright promised Civil Rights on the campaign trail, over his term he came to be increasingly sympathetic to the cause. In a June 1963 speech, President Kennedy defined civil rights as a moral cause, declaring that “it is an individual and collective moral duty to provide equality to African Americans.”<sup>59</sup> As Carter and his family were staunch Kennedy supporters, he would use this speech as a basis for his position on the issue in the later political positions, speaking in favor of Civil Rights and the abolition of literacy tests.<sup>60</sup>

Upon returning to Plains, Jimmy Carter began to move into the political sphere as a career change. He began to take leadership positions for various civic entities, such as the school board. He was appointed to a seat on the Sumter County Board of Education in 1955 and would eventually become its chairman. Carter would be outspoken on his support for racial integration

---

<sup>57</sup> Morris page 115

<sup>58</sup> Bourne page 134-136

<sup>59</sup> “Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963.” *Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963* | JFK Library, [www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/report-to-the-american-people-on-civil-rights-11-june-1963](http://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/report-to-the-american-people-on-civil-rights-11-june-1963).

<sup>60</sup> Bourne, page 134

in his later political career, though during his time on the school board, he remained silent on the issue. Even after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, the Sumter County Board of Education continued to operate under the principle of “separate but equal.”<sup>61</sup> In 1956, Carter initiated a resolution that intended to keep white and Black children off the sidewalk at the same time.<sup>62</sup> This temporal segregation was “incorporated as a routine part of daily life” and Carter made little effort to cease this practice.<sup>63</sup>

When Carter chaired the committee, he once again reinforced this idea by denying black citizens of Plains, Americus and the surrounding area the right to use the same facilities as their fellow white citizens.<sup>64</sup> Carter and the board provided more funding and supplies to the African American schools that had already been established, while not consolidating schools and integrating students. Deanna L. Michael, professor at the University of South Florida, said of this time in Carter’s career, “The building program for schools for African American children that the county board intended to derail segregation fell far short of equality...Equalization of facilities between black and white students was fundamentally a political ploy to maintain white supremacy and the board members, including Carter, knew it.”<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Michael, Deanna L. *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency*. Page 17

<sup>62</sup> Sumter County Board of Education Minutes, September 24, 1956.

<sup>63</sup> Weyeneth, Robert R. *The Architecture of Racial Segregation: the Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past*. Page 18.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, page 31

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

It did not take long before Carter began gaining political status. Once a state senate seat became available in 1962, Carter entering the election fifteen days prior and ultimately won the seat. During his time in the state senate, he served as the chair of the Education Committee and seated on the Appropriations Committee, expanding upon statewide education funding.<sup>66</sup> He gained further recognition in and around his town in 1965 for being one of three people (the others being his mother and his wife) to openly vote against Plains Baptist Church barring African Americans to worship in its pews.<sup>67</sup>

Carter considered running for an open Congressional seat, though he ultimately ran an unsuccessful bid for governor in 1966. He ended his campaign during the primary season, conceding to Democratic segregationist Lester Maddox. In a story from *The Constitution* in June 1966, the author stated that “Carter has described himself as a Russell Democrat (meaning former governor Richard B. Russell), which if taken at face value means he is fairly conservative.”<sup>68</sup> While that was not a successful tactic in this election, he took very few hard positions on issues and it would be a vital notion for his next campaign for governor, later for president and for his public perception now. Biographer Kenneth Morris described this time in Carter’s life as the period which would have him reach “personal and political maturity that would define him as a public man.”<sup>69</sup> It was during this period in which his daughter Amy was

---

<sup>66</sup> Carter, Jimmy. *Why Not the Best? the First Fifty Years*. Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1996. Page 117-126

<sup>67</sup> Morris page 42

<sup>68</sup> Bourne, page 152

<sup>69</sup> Morris, page 171

born, he entered into politics full time, and became a “born again” Christian. As his sons were young adults, Carter viewed this time to raise Amy as a fresh start.<sup>70</sup> The born-again movement was rising in popularity in 1960s America which would be advantageous in Carter’s later political career. He stated “My faith does not change. It is a stabilizing factor in my life.”<sup>71</sup> With the social and political anxieties and turbulence of the late 1960s, this ideal struck a powerful nerve with Georgia voters. Carter gave the voters a sense of where much of his decision making was coming from, whether they agreed with him or not.<sup>72</sup>

Carter was incredibly careful as to not be characterized as a “liberal” or a “conservative” during his campaign, noting that “I believe that I am a more complicated person than that.”<sup>73</sup> With these significant life changes having occurred, Carter prepared himself for another run at the governorship in 1970. He kept himself in the public eye, traveling across the state, giving speeches and meeting the population. Lester Maddox was prohibited by the Georgia Constitution at the time from running for a second consecutive term, leaving a less crowded Democratic field for Carter to gain the nomination. Carter entered the race as a populist candidate. Carter was not a populist in the manner of William Jennings Bryan or George Wallace, but it is now that he begins to emphasize his small-town roots as an appeal to the American people. He portrayed himself as an outsider, untainted by political corruption. Historically, populism had resonated with agrarian voters and this is where Carter found his niche. He appealed to the working class,

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Bourne, page 17

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, page 180

<sup>73</sup> Bourne, page 174

emphasizing his farmer background, that he was one of them and not a member of the Washington political elite. He would use this same tactic going into his presidential campaign in 1976. He campaigned on the idea that he would curb the excess of the “Imperial Presidency” of the previous occupants of the White House. Through this rather vague campaign strategy, he was able to attract a unique coalition of both white conservatives and African Americans.

By 1970, though, the issue of racial segregation could not be ignored. As he would do with his presidency, Carter worked to appeal to both segregationists and the proponents of Civil Rights. Carter himself was pro-integration, but he recognized that outwardly taking that stance would alienate the segregationist base that held control in the South. Therefore, he moved between the two parties to gain support from both sides. Carter worked to garner both the African American vote as well as the “Wallace Vote”, named after prominent Alabama segregationist George Wallace.<sup>74</sup> Wallace had carried Georgia in the previous presidential election and gaining his supporters would be vital to winning the governor’s seat.

His opponent on the Democratic side was Carl Sanders, who had served as governor from 1963-1967. Carter spoke about Sanders with a rhetoric that was linked to Wallace, likening Sanders to “big government”, “the power elite” and “the Washington establishment.”<sup>75</sup> Carter positioned himself as a populist, striving to relate with the Georgian population who felt disconnected from their government. Carter’s personal pollster for the campaign William Hamilton described him as a “stylistic populist, one whose success derived not from changing

---

<sup>74</sup> Sanders, Randy. ““The Sad Duty of Politics”: Jimmy Carter and the Issue of Race in His 1970 Gubernatorial Campaign.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (1992): 612-38

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, page 619

specific policies, but from changing personal campaign style.”<sup>76</sup> This political strategy would aid in his appearance as a non-partisan politician later in his life.

One of the more poignant tactics that the Carter campaign used against Sanders was circling a photo of his opponent being doused in champagne by two black Atlanta Hawks basketball players. Known as “champagne shampoo”, the flyer circulated throughout small towns and even at Ku Klux Klan rallies.<sup>77</sup> Though Sanders would force a runoff for the nomination, the association with these players drew too many white votes away for Sanders to recover, with Carter carrying three out of 4 white votes.<sup>78</sup> Notably, Carl Sanders did garner 93% of the African American vote.<sup>79</sup>

In the general election, Jimmy Carter faced Republican Hal Suit. Suit only “had about one fourth as much money as Carter and about one-tenth as much organization.”<sup>80</sup> Carter built an early and commanding lead which he never let go of. On November 3, 1970, Carter became the 76<sup>th</sup> Governor of Georgia, winning 63% of the vote.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> William R. Hamilton quoted in *The American Governor in Behavioral Perspective*. (Beyle, Thad L., and J. Oliver Williams) 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Sanders, page 627

<sup>78</sup> Ibid page 633

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid page 634

<sup>81</sup> Delaney, Paul. “A Peanut Farmer Wins Race in Georgia.” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1970.



In his inaugural speech, Carter said “I say quite frankly to you that the time for racial discrimination is over.”<sup>82</sup> This radical statement delivered the national attention that Carter so greatly desired. Over his term, he would increase the number of African American staff in the Georgia government by 25%.<sup>83</sup> Just a few months into his term, he was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine where he was referred to as “one of a new breed of young political leaders in the South, known for their moderate racial views and progressive economic and social policies.”<sup>84</sup> (see *Figure 4*)



*Figure 4. TIME Cover May 1971*

---

<sup>82</sup> “Jimmy Carter Inaugural Address for Governor of Georgia.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, January 12, 1971.

<sup>83</sup> Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Life Before the Presidency.” University of Virginia's Miller Center, December 18, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> *Time* magazine, May 31, 1971

The election of 1976 came at a crossroads of American history. The country was emerging from the fallout of the Watergate scandal, Ford's pardoning of Richard Nixon, and the end of the Vietnam War which left Americans distrustful of their government.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, 1976 marked the bicentennial of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. John Bodnar writes that "for many Americans, the weekend celebration surrounding July 4, 1976, marked an end to a period of social unrest and dissent and a renewal of American consensus and patriotism."<sup>86</sup> Through the recreation of the Revolutionary past, the federal government was able to focus the public attention on traditional American values, especially through the use of nostalgia.<sup>87</sup> While Ford presided over these celebrations, this need for a "return to normalcy" and Carter's epitomization of the "American Dream" allowed for the Carter presidential campaign to thrive.

Carter opened his campaign in front of the Little White House, the summer home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, in Warm Springs, Georgia. This tactic was a double entendre in that Carter was able to associate himself with the legacy and the nostalgia of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency and opening from a small town reinforced the ideals from which the Carter campaign was based. (see *Figure 5*). He ran a campaign that was centered around the idea that moral leadership was best attained through moral character. He opened his campaign with the statement "I'll never lie to you."<sup>88</sup> Further, he spoke about morality in the context of his own personal

---

<sup>85</sup> "Trust in Government: 1958-2015." Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Bodnar page 227.

<sup>87</sup> Ryan, David. "RE-ENACTING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH NOSTALGIA – THE 1976 US BICENTENNIAL AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR."

<sup>88</sup> Sanders page 637

character. He intertwined his Christian faith with his campaign promises in order to appeal to the religious as well as those who were not. In September 1976, a Gallup poll showed that 68% of respondents believed that “Carter was a man of high moral character” as well as 72% for “bright and intelligent” and a “religious person.”<sup>89</sup>

In his campaign announcement speech, he said “Our people are hungry for integrity and competence in government. In this confused and fast-changing, technological world we still have within us the capability for national greatness...for our nation—for all of us—the question is: Why not the best?”<sup>90</sup>



*Figure 5. Carter campaign speech with Rosalynn, Amy and Lillian Carter (courtesy of the Library of Congress)*

---

<sup>89</sup> Gallup poll conducted September 24-27, 1976, reported October 26-27, 1976

<sup>90</sup> ADDRESS BY JIMMY CARTER ANNOUNCING HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE 1976 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, December 1974

When Carter announced his candidacy, few took him seriously. The one-term governor from Georgia had made few marks on the national political scene thus far. His name recognition was non-existent. Though he had been on the cover of *TIME* just a few years ago, he had not yet reached the level of establishment politicians that garnered national name recognition. The *Atlanta Constitution* ran the headline “Jimmy Who Is Running For What?”<sup>91</sup> While this position is not ideal for most presidential candidates, his anonymity proved vital to his campaign. He posed himself as an outsider who had significant distance from Washington and more specifically from the Watergate scandal that Ford was entangled in. Due to his positioning from previous elections, he was able to not brand himself as a “liberal” but as a centrist and a moderate reformer. He shunned the use of political jargon which particularly emphasized his outsider status. Carter’s aides referred to the candidate as “just a redneck farmer from South Georgia.”<sup>92</sup> Reiterating this perception, Carter opened his presidential campaign center in the train depot in Plains. Though his true headquarters was based out of Atlanta, the Depot provided Carter with a backdrop for his homegrown, southern roots narrative that he portrayed to voters.

Slowly but surely, Carter closed in on the Democratic nomination, officially securing it in July 1976. In the fall of 1976, Carter had a 33-point lead over Ford.<sup>93</sup> The Carter campaign, though, was not without its missteps. He agreed to an interview with *Playboy* magazine in which he admitted that he “looked on a lot of women with lust. I have committed adultery in my heart

---

<sup>91</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1974

<sup>92</sup> Merony, John. “How to Elect a President: Jimmy Carter, Two South Georgia Political Novices, and the Unpredictable Road to the White House.” *Atlanta Magazine*, March 9, 2020.

<sup>93</sup> Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Campaigns and Elections.” UVA's Miller Center, July 17, 2017.

many times.”<sup>94</sup> The magazine had previously interviewed figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and *Playboy* peaked in popularity in 1975, so the interview was an attempt to reach its 5.6 million per issue readership.<sup>95</sup> Yet, this interview alone virtually eliminated the lead that Carter once had over Ford. Radio commentator Alistair Cooke reasoned this reaction by saying “the confessions were a liability, not because Americans looked down on someone who admitted to sin, but because the admissions seemed to come from an unfamiliar world, the world of the washed-in-the-blood Southern Baptist.”<sup>96</sup>

On election day, pollsters showed the two were nearly even among voters. At 3:30 am, the election was called for Carter. Carter gained 297 electoral votes to Ford’s 240; Carter narrowly defeated Ford in the popular vote by just two percentage points.<sup>97</sup> He carried nearly all of the former Solid South states, winning every former Confederate state except for Virginia.<sup>98</sup> 62% of white voters without a college degree cast their vote for Mr. Carter <sup>99</sup>, and 83% of

---

<sup>94</sup> Perlstein, Rick. “An Interview With 'Playboy' Magazine Nearly Torpedoed Jimmy Carter's Presidential Campaign.” Smithsonian Institution, August 17, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> The New York Times. “Playboy in Popular Culture,” September 28, 2017.

<sup>96</sup> Alistair Cooke quoted in “When Jimmy Carter lusted in his heart” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*

<sup>97</sup> Morris page 228

<sup>98</sup> Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Campaigns and Elections.” UVA's Miller Center, July 17, 2017.

<sup>99</sup> Khalid, Asma. “Republicans' White Working-Class Trap: A Growing Reliance.” NPR January 18, 2016.

African Americans did the same.<sup>100</sup> With this win, he became the first candidate from the Deep South elected since before the Civil War.

Simply put, Carter was the right person at the right time, personifying what the nation believed they needed in order to move past the distrust of the Watergate and Vietnam era of the early 1970s. His biography of being a farmer and of Main Street values portrayed a classic American story that appealed to a wider population than just the political elite.

### *Presidency*

In the first sentence of his inauguration speech, Carter said of predecessor Gerald Ford: “For myself and for our Nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land.”<sup>101</sup> A few sentences later, he references Julia Coleman and her influence on his education and his life. He touched on the idea of the American Dream at multiple points as well as noting passages from the Bible. From the first moments of his presidency, Carter emphasized his non-partisan ideals, appealing to a broader range of the population.

Following the ceremony, President Carter, hand in hand with his wife and daughter, stepped out into the public, walking more than a mile of the route to the White House.<sup>102</sup> (see *Figure 6*) This action portrayed to the nation that he is a “people’s president.” This break from tradition emphasized his outsider status and the “new spirit” that he had called for in his

---

<sup>100</sup> “How Groups Voted in 1976.” Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

<sup>101</sup> Library, Jimmy Carter. “Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.

<sup>102</sup> “The Inauguration of Jimmy Carter.” The White House Historical Association.

inauguration speech.<sup>103</sup> Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin said of this, “Once somebody does something innovative, it becomes tradition.”<sup>104</sup> Every successive president, excluding Joe Biden due to the coronavirus pandemic, have followed suit and walked with the people.



*Figure 6.* The Carters walking along the route to the White House, 1977 (courtesy of the Library of Congress)

As with every presidency, there are successes and failures, both left to history to decide their legacy. Carter’s term is largely seen as an underperformance for his skillset and slightly

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin cited in “The Inaugural Parade, and the Presidents Who Walked It.” The New York Times. The New York Times, January 20, 2017.

above average from other presidents, according to historians.<sup>105</sup> His accomplishments are often overshadowed by period of rising inflation, an energy crisis, and the effects of the Cold War. The country desperately wanted the president to succeed following the turmoil of the Watergate scandal and its fallout. Carter campaigned on the idea that he was an honest man aiming to regain the trust of the public.

This idea is evidently seen in his domestic policy. His populist notions continued into his presidency, notably when he attempted to revamp the healthcare system, as well as welfare reform and national tax policy. Within the first moments of his presidency, Carter pardoned all Vietnam War draft evaders with Proclamation 4483 which was met with both praise and backlash.<sup>106</sup> Carter created the Department of Energy and established a national energy policy that reduced American dependency on foreign oil products. He expanded the national park system and protected the most acres of land of any president.<sup>107</sup> He fulfilled his campaign promise of creating a cabinet level position for education, with the Department of Education being officially established in October 1979.<sup>108</sup>

Notably, Jimmy Carter was one of the first, if not the first, to recognize popular music as a way for a politician to connect with the American people. The Allman Brothers and James Brown had aided in Carter's campaign for president and helped him garner the "young vote." Carter said of music, "I'd say that the common beat that people have within them, a desire for

---

<sup>105</sup> "Presidential Approval Ratings -- Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends." Gallup, November 26, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> "Proclamation 4483." National Archives and Records Administration, January 1977.

<sup>107</sup> Cullinane page 183

<sup>108</sup> Department of Education Organization Act, P.L. 96-98, 93 STAT. 695 (1979)



country music or desire for rock or desire for jazz or a desire for classical music, is something that binds people together.”<sup>109</sup> Aretha Franklin performed at his inauguration. Johnny Cash was a frequent visitor to the White House. Jimmy and Rosalynn hosted the first jazz festival at the White House with performers such as Dizzy Gillespie and Max Roach.<sup>110</sup> This use of various types of music emphasized Carter’s general approachability. His friendships with Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan exemplified his appeal to “regular” voters. Visitor Dolly Parton often refrains from political interventions, only adding to Carter’s non-partisan association (see *Figure 7*).



*Figure 7. The Carters with Dolly Parton, October 1979*

His domestic policy, though, was not always met with approval. Carter had inherited a declining economy from the Ford administration and periods of “stagflation” burdened the American people. While he would leave office with the addition of nearly 8 million jobs, the

---

<sup>109</sup> *Jimmy Carter: Rock and Roll President*. Directed by Mary Wharton. CNN, 2021

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

high unemployment rates of the late 1970s are most often attributed to his presidency.<sup>111</sup> In addition, as with the “bring back honesty to Washington” that he had campaigned on, he did not make backroom deals with Congressional members. This distrust of Congress by Carter ultimately left Congress distrustful of their president. While his success rate in passing presidential initiatives was much higher than that of his predecessors, he had gained a reputation in Washington of political ineptitude.<sup>112</sup> His strained relationship with established Congressional Democrats, due to his unwillingness to return political favors, allowed for these measures on his agenda to not receive enough support to become law.<sup>113</sup>

Internationally, his administration put a new emphasis on human rights, making it an integral part of his foreign policy. Carter aimed to hold allies accountable for their human rights violations, while physically intervening in other countries when deemed necessary. This position is based out of the United Nation’s “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>114</sup> He openly condemned allies such as South Korea, while restricting aid to the Chilean and Nicaraguan governments as a protest. He legitimized human rights concerns, though straining relationships with allies and Congressmen in the process. His most noted foreign policy success is that of the Camp David Accords. For twelve days in September 1978, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin met to negotiate peace between the two countries,

---

<sup>111</sup> “James Carter.” The White House.

<sup>112</sup> Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Domestic Affairs.” University of Virginia's Miller Center, December 18, 2020.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Foreign Affairs.” University of Virginia's Miller Center, December 18, 2020.

mediated by President Carter. The result of these meetings, “A Framework for Peace in the Middle East”, laid the groundwork for formal relations between the two countries.<sup>115</sup> The long-term impact of the Accords remains up for debate, though it ensured trade and economic relations between the two countries and the United States.

Conversely, Carter’s greatest failure was seen in the Iranian Hostage Crisis. The Iranian monarch, known as the Shah, had been deposed from his seat of power by his own people in January 1979. The Iranian Revolution ensued, leaving the Ayatollah Khomeini in power. Later that year, Carter granted the Shah entrance into the United States to seek medical treatment for his lymphoma, an extension of his policy on human rights. Tensions between the United States and Iran had been intensifying for decades. This action intensified the anti-American sentiments within the people of Iran. As a result, in November 1979, a group of 500 militarized Iranian college students stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking American hostages. 52 hostages would be held for 444 days inside the Embassy. In April 1980, Carter attempted a rescue mission, known as Operation Eagle Claw. This mission failed, leaving 8 servicemen dead and the Carter administration embarrassed on the world stage.<sup>116</sup> 1980 was an election year and this failure allowed for Carter to be portrayed as weak and ineffectual by his opponents.

It would be the same characteristics that facilitated Carter’s election that would take him out of office in 1980. The “Religious Right” and religious fundamentalism had been growing in popularity throughout the 1970s. Carter’s election to the presidency actively represented a

---

<sup>115</sup> “Camp David Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.” U.S. Department of State: The Office of the Historian. Accessed January 2021.

<sup>116</sup> “Key Moments in the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis at US Embassy.” Associated Press, November 4, 2019.

renewed presence of the white Evangelical southerner on the political scene. Carter, though, was unable to capture this base in the long term. He was seen as too Christian for the Democratic Party and not Christian enough for the Republican Party. After a term of low economic growth and high inflation rates, paired with crises abroad, the American people were losing confidence in President Carter. In response to these issues, Carter gave a speech detailing a “crisis in confidence” that was a “fundamental threat to American democracy.”<sup>117</sup> Known at the “Malaise speech” (though that word was never used), the speech represented the belief that Carter was also losing interest in the American people.<sup>118</sup> Going into the primaries, Carter faced opposition Massachusetts senator Ted Kennedy for the Democratic nomination. Carter once again based his campaign on his morality, attacking the moral failings of Kennedy, namely the Chappaquiddick incident, as well as his infamous yet iconic family.<sup>119</sup> Carter capitalized on this aspect as well as his incumbency to reclaim the Democratic nomination. He once again partnered with his Vice President Walter Mondale. The Republican Party nominated former governor of California Ronald Reagan and running mate former Director of the CIA George H.W. Bush to face the Carter in the general election.

Jimmy Carter faced pressure from all sides concerning his presidency during his reelection campaign. His perceived ineffectuality caused a group of “Reagan Democrats” to form within his own party. There was a strong push from center Independent candidate John

---

<sup>117</sup> Mattson, Kevin. “Examining Carter's 'Malaise Speech,' 30 Years Later.” NPR

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Morris page 278

Anderson, who garnered support from moderates and college students.<sup>120</sup> Televangelist Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority" shifted the white evangelical vote, that had been Carter's in 1976, towards Reagan. The group that had bolstered Carter's rise to power facilitated in his political downfall. As a result, Ronald Reagan defeated Carter in a November 1980 landslide victory, earning 489 electoral votes to Carter's 44.<sup>121</sup> (see *Figure 8*) Though Reagan was the oldest president elected at the time of his victory at 69, his approach seemed to be fresh, new and most importantly not like Carter's. Exiting polling showed that half of those who voted for Reagan were voting against Carter rather than for Reagan.<sup>122</sup> Carter noted that while he was hurt by the outcome of the election he had "a deep appreciation of the system, however, that lets people make a free choice about who will lead them for the next four years."<sup>123</sup> With this concession, Jimmy and Rosalynn prepared to return to their home in Plains, though Carter did not intend to fade into political memory.

---

<sup>120</sup> Clymer, Adam. "John Anderson, Who Ran Against Reagan and Carter in 1980, Is Dead at 95." *The New York Times*. December 4, 2017.

<sup>121</sup> "1980 Electoral College Results." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed January 2021.

<sup>122</sup> Bourne page 472

<sup>123</sup> "President Jimmy Carter Concession Speech." C-SPAN. Accessed January 19, 2021.

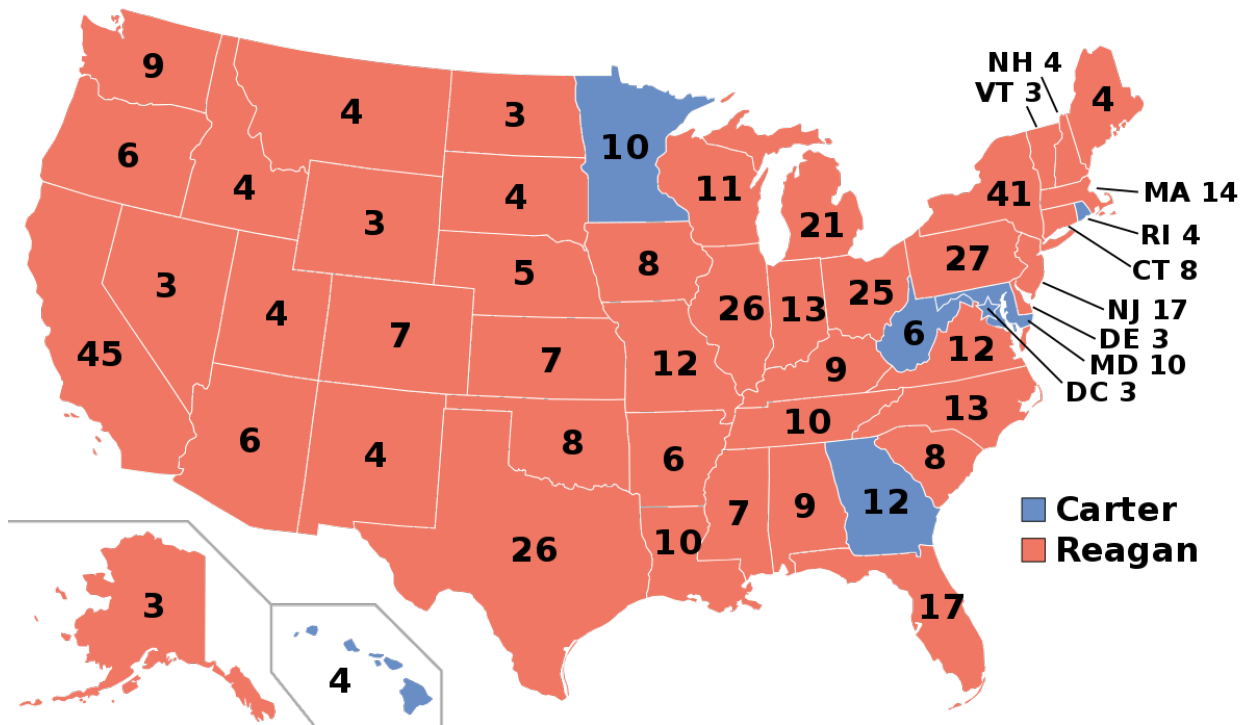


Figure 8. 1980 Electoral Map <sup>124</sup>

### Post Presidency

Jimmy Carter has had one of the most prolific, and one of the longest, post-presidencies of any former American president. Few believe Carter to be a “Rushmore-worthy” president, but most admire his “core decency.”<sup>125</sup> He took what he referred to as the “Truman Approach” to his post-presidential life, coined after his favorite president who did not try to profit off of his former position.<sup>126</sup> Upon leaving office in 1981, the Carters returned to Plains, where they

<sup>124</sup> “1980 Electoral College Results.” National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed January 2021.

<sup>125</sup> Greenberg, David. “The Feats and Failures of Jimmy Carter.” The New York Times, October 1, 2020.

<sup>126</sup> “Jimmy Carter: A Man of Principle – Still Active, Still Looking for Ways to Serve | Observer Editorial.” The Guardian. September 10, 2011.

continue to spend the majority of their time. He had left control of his peanut business in a blind trust during his presidency, returning to about \$1 million in debt.<sup>127</sup> It was because of this debt that he was sold the business and began writing as a source of income. He would also use this as a method to cope with the toll of an electoral defeat.<sup>128</sup> Throughout his career, he has authored 33 books, only two of which were published before and during his presidency.

At the same time, work began on the Carter Center. The non-profit humanitarian aid center was opened in conjunction with his presidential library in Atlanta, Georgia. The Carter Center continues the ideals that Carter set forth during his presidency with the official mission statement reading: “The Carter Center is guided by the principles of our Founders, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter. Founded, in partnership with Emory University, on a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering, the Center seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health.”<sup>129</sup> Carter built upon his success with the Camp David Accords by using the Center in peacekeeping efforts throughout the world though mainly focused in Africa.<sup>130</sup> The Center boasts of a near eradication of the Guinea worm disease, dropping the number of world cases from 3.5 million in 1986 to just 27 in 2020.<sup>131</sup> In addition, the Center works to promote fair democracy through the monitoring of world elections.

---

<sup>127</sup> Elk, Kathleen. “When Former President Jimmy Carter Left Office, His Peanut Business Was \$1 Million in Debt.” CNBC, July 18, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Bourne page 475

<sup>129</sup> “Our Mission.” The Carter Center. Accessed January 2021.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> “Guinea Worm Case Totals.” The Carter Center, December 2020.

Carter is the first and only president at this time to transform his presidential library into a humanitarian center. The construction of the Carter Center is the single greatest project that Jimmy Carter could have undertaken in order to rebuild his image. In the opening of the Center in 1986, President Reagan spoke about Carter, saying “It struck me that perhaps the central gift that this Center will give to the Nation is a story—a story of one man’s life, a story that is distinctively American.”<sup>132</sup> Throughout the speech, Reagan consistently refers to Carter as his equal, emphasizing Carter’s faith and his core belief in hard work. With Ronald Reagan being the quintessential 1980s Republican figurehead, this rhetoric allowed for Carter to begin repairing his public persona. In just over ten years from the Center’s opening, Carter’s overall approval rating jumped from 34% to 73%.<sup>133</sup>

In addition to his work with the Center, both Jimmy and Rosalynn became increasingly involved with Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit volunteer Christian organization that works to build homes for families in need. The Carters were instrumental in this organization from Americus, Georgia, becoming a global institution. Today, Habitat for Humanity is the largest not-for-profit builder in the world.<sup>134</sup> The couple have had their hands in building or repairing more than 4,300 homes in their nearly 40 years of service to the organization.<sup>135</sup> Their work with Habitat began in 1984 with small projects. Due to the increased interest in the group, the Jimmy

---

<sup>132</sup> “Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony for the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, Georgia.” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, October 1, 1986.

<sup>133</sup> “Jimmy Carter Improves with Age.” ABC News.com Poll, Poll Conducted September 1999, Released October 1, 1999.

<sup>134</sup> “About Habitat for Humanity.” Habitat for Humanity.

<sup>135</sup> Klein, Betsy. “At 95, Jimmy Carter Is Still Living His Faith through Service.” CNN, October 12, 2019.



and Rosalynn Carter Work Project began in 1986 and is a weeklong event that runs annually. He works in the same uniform as the rest of the volunteers, standing out only by his advanced age comparatively. Carter, notably, continued work for the Project after a 2019 fall in his home that left him with a black eye (see *Figure 9*).



*Figure 9.* Carter working for Habitat for Humanity, October 2019

In 2002, Jimmy Carter received the Nobel Peace Prize “for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights and to promote social and economic development.”<sup>136</sup> He is one of two native Georgians to win the award along with Martin Luther King Jr. He is also the only president at this time to have been awarded the prize while not in office.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> “Jimmy Carter-- The Nobel Peace Prize 2002.” NobelPrize.org, 2002.

<sup>137</sup> “Jimmy Carter Wins Nobel Peace Prize.” History.com, November 24, 2009.

This combined humanitarian work allowed for Carter to be seen as a non-partisan figure in the eyes of the public. He would always be known as a politician though his unremarkable four years in office have been overshadowed by his forty years of public service. When speaking on his post-presidential life, Carter noted “I’ll stop when I have to. But I won’t stop until I have to.”<sup>138</sup> He announced that he was diagnosed with brain and liver cancer in August 2015, further announcing his remission in December of the same year.<sup>139</sup> He continues to teach Sunday School at Maranatha Baptist Church and classes at Emory University, though both have been halted for the moment by the COVID-19 pandemic. He remains an active part of the Plains community as well as serving on the board for the Plains Historical Preservation Trust.

Jimmy Carter’s life has spanned more than a generation. His life conveys the abstract principle of the American Dream. His non-partisan public persona was established from the very beginning of his political career. With each of his campaigns for state senate, governor and president, Carter reemphasized this idea. Carter carefully curated this image of himself and this concept of non-partisanship is central to the interpretation of this life at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. This analysis of Carter lends itself to him being perceived as being a person of ethical morality, a trait not often attributed to politicians, rather than a former Democratic president.

---

<sup>138</sup> Klein, Betsy. “At 95, Jimmy Carter Is Still Living His Faith through Service.” CNN. October 12, 2019.

<sup>139</sup> “Statement from Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.” The Carter Center. December 5, 2015.

#### **Chapter Four: Jimmy Carter National Historic Site: its Establishment and Plains High School**

*"The homes of American Presidents that have been preserved represent an invaluable resource for all Americans... But in preserving only the homes of major historical figures, we tend to lose much of the essence of ordinary life that would illuminate those times... As currently planned, the Jimmy Carter historical site and park would serve both these important purposes."*<sup>140</sup>

--Georgia Senator Sam Nunn

A defining ideal of any historic site is the connection between person and place, understanding someone better by understanding where they came from. This idea is continuous at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. Carter is one of the only American presidents to maintain a strong connection with his birthplace. This concept is central to how he is interpreted here. Only a minimal amount of the site is dedicated to his 4 years as president. The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site does significant work in order to make this progressive political candidate palatable to conservative visitors while not ignoring his core values. His political leanings are not omitted from the narrative, though they are not once explicitly stated at any point in the site. Carter's small-town roots, childhood, and continued connection with the area are emphasized to a greater degree than any president to date. A majority of presidents have their birth site memorialized yet few return to that place following the end of their presidency. Bill Clinton's birth home in Hope, Arkansas is a National Historic Site, though the Clintons now split their time between New York and Washington, D.C.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> *Plain Talk: A Newsletter from the National Park Service*, February 1991

<sup>141</sup> Nagourney, Adam. "With Some Help, Clintons Purchase a White House." *The New York Times*.

Carter biographer and former top Carter aide, Stuart Eizenstat, said “Plains is really part of his DNA. He carried it into the White House, and he carried it out of the White House.”<sup>142</sup> Plains, Georgia further sets Carter apart from his contemporaries. Much of the history about Jimmy Carter can be traced back to Plains. Its typicalness is reinforced throughout much of the historical site, with nothing to make it different from the next town over. Its significance is drawn from its presidential connection. Plains’ intrigue relies on its remoteness, on the nostalgia of it being a small rural southern town. The town is just over an hour away from any major highway. There are no signs on the road into town about the location of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site until approximately 15 minutes outside of Plains. Thus, visitors have to make a genuine effort in order to visit the site. They are coming to see Jimmy Carter. This is reinforced by the fact that a majority of visitors come to the site to potentially see or even meet the former president, a possibility that is not available at any other presidential homesite.<sup>143</sup>

The Carter site poses an interesting dynamic in that he still lives in the area, meaning that he has had the opportunity to play an active role in the interpretation of his life. Most, if not all, changes at the site currently pass through the hands of the Carters. Carter tells his own story, in his own words. He controls what is included in his narrative as well as what is excluded, an opportunity that is not afforded many presidents. While there is no option for a virtual tour of the JCNHS, there are audio tour spots scattered throughout the site. The QR codes allow for the visitor to access pieces of the tour and further information on their cell phones. This inclusion

---

<sup>142</sup> Stuart Eizenstat cited in “The Un-Celebrity President: Jimmy Carter Shuns Riches, Lives Modestly in His Georgia Hometown.” *The Washington Post*, August 17, 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Miller, Zachary D.; Rice, William L.; Taff, B. D.; Newman, Peter. 2018. "Understanding Visitor Motivations at Jimmy Carter National Historic Site: A Principal Components Approach." *Heritage* 1, no. 2: 328-334.

makes the site increasingly available to a wider audience, both with a younger, more tech savvy generation as well as those who are visually impaired (see *Figure 10*). Carter's voice (both Jimmy and Rosalynn) fills these interludes. Hearing the voices of the Carters, as well as other Plains residents, allows for a more personable interaction with the site for the visitor. It is almost as if Mr. Carter is speaking directly to the visitor.



*Figure 10.* Audio Tour Sign Example

## *History of Plains*

Native Americans established a small population in this area of southwest Georgia beginning in 13,000 B.C. until the introduction of European settlers in 1540.<sup>144</sup> Under the First Treaty of Washington, the Creek Indians were removed from the Flint River region, today defined as Sumter County, in 1827.<sup>145</sup> The following year, the first white, American couples moved into the region and Sumter County was officially platted in 1831.<sup>146</sup>

Originally located a mile north, in modern day Magnolia Springs, Plains moved south to be closer to the new 37-mile railroad connecting the towns of Americus, Preston and Lumpkin. This railroad made getting cotton to the market easier and more convenient for the agrarian town. Essentially, “Plains, like many tiny towns that dot the rural landscape, existed primarily to provide a transportation and commercial hub for rural farmers.”<sup>147</sup> As such, a train depot was built and slowly Plains became a relative “boom town”. By 1920, the population had reached 600 and was thriving in the agricultural sector with the production of peanuts and shipments of other products. It was during this time that three local physicians, known as the Wise Brothers, established the Wise Hospital, which became known as “the little Mayo Clinic.”<sup>148</sup> As with much of the rest of the country, the town lost its prosperity with the onset of the Great Depression. From there, Plains settled into being a quiet Southern town. Its tempo would

---

<sup>144</sup> O'Brien, page 9

<sup>145</sup> Inscoe, John C. “Sumter County.” New Georgia Encyclopedia

<sup>146</sup> Ibid

<sup>147</sup> Morris page 24

<sup>148</sup> Ibid

accelerate with the election of native Jimmy Carter in 1970, even more with his election to the presidency in 1976. Thousands of people visited the area daily to catch a glimpse of the governor and future president. Since the end of Carter's presidency, though, the town has once again settled into its quaintness.

### *Site History*

Owned and operated by the National Park Service, the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site was created through Public Law 100-206 on December 23, 1987, the same day that it was added to the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>149</sup> The site was originally proposed in late 1981, just after Carter returned home to Plains. During this time, the National Park Service was in a period of stagnation, wanting to improve upon the sites that they already owned rather than procuring any new lands.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, congressional members were concerned with forming a commemorative site for a president who was still living, as well as the fact that a number of resources in Plains needed renovation which would require a much larger budget. Due to the introduction of legislation by Representative Richard Ray, that negotiation took place. As a result, the federal government agreed to pay for 60% of the renovation budget, but the remaining money had to be locally raised.<sup>151</sup> With this qualifier, in addition to the fundraising efforts, it

---

<sup>149</sup> "Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" Plains, Sumter County, Georgia; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987)

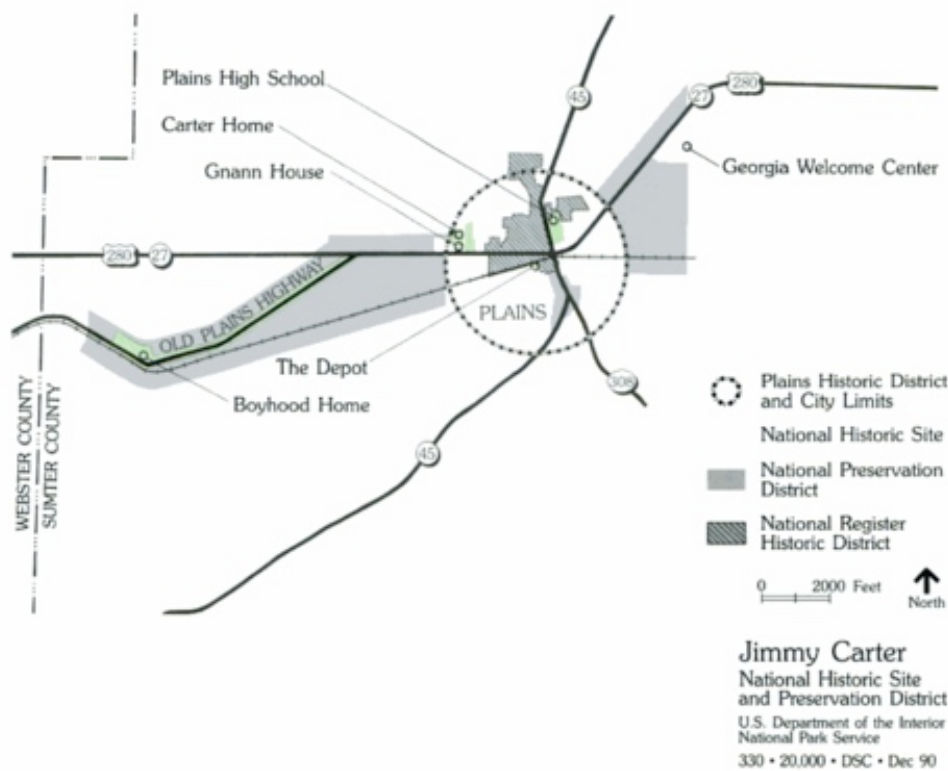
<sup>150</sup> Lechner, Zachary, "Commemorating Jimmy Carter and Southern Rural Life in Plains, Georgia." *Born in the U.S.A.: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*, edited by Seth Bruggeman, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012, pp 74-75

<sup>151</sup> "Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" Plains, Sumter County, Georgia; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987)

further rooted the townspeople of Plains with the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and its interpretation. The people now had a physical stake in the narrative described at the site and how their town was perceived.

### *Site Description*

The site consists of non-contiguous parcels located in both Plains, Georgia and the nearby town of Archery. Three specific sites are contained within the larger historic site: Plains High School, the Plains Train Depot and the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home, as well as 100 feet of scenic easements along Old Plains Highway.<sup>152</sup> (see *Figure 11*)



*Figure 11.* Map of Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Jimmy Carter National Historic Site” Plains, Sumter County, Georgia; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2012)

<sup>153</sup> O’Brien page 3



The choice of these spaces for the historic site were made to "(1) preserve the key sites and structures located within the historic site associated with Jimmy Carter during his lifespan; (2) provide for the interpretation of the life and Presidency of Jimmy Carter; and (3) present the history of a small rural southern town."<sup>154</sup> The Boyhood Home is the space in which Jimmy Carter spent the majority of his formative years prior to his departure for college. Plains High School is where both Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter attended first through eleventh grade. The Train Depot served as an emblematic campaign headquarters in Carter's 1976 quest for the presidency and served as the original visitor center before the renovation and reopening of Plains High School in October 1996.<sup>155</sup> The Carter Compound, the Gnaan House and the Gnaan Carriage House at 1 Woodland Drive are also included in the site, though they are not currently open to the public as they are still in use by the former president and his Secret Service detail. Each of these buildings are under the direct control of the National Park Service. Additionally, the Plains Historic District, designated in 1984, as well as 650 acres of agricultural lands are encompassed in this site.<sup>156</sup> On January 19, 2021, the site was redesignated from a historic site to the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park.<sup>157</sup> This upgrade comes with additional protections afforded by the National Park Service as well as designation that the significance of the area extends beyond just a few buildings.

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> National Park Service, "Foundation Document: Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" NPS 330/116616, March 2013, page 3

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Jimmy Carter National Historical Park Redesignation Act, Pub. L. No: 116-341 (2021)

As stated in the NPS Foundation Document, the mission statement of the national historical park is

to benefit, inspire, and educate present and future generations of people by interpreting the broad stories of Jimmy Carter's life, preserving the resources associated with those stories, presenting the history and evolution of Plains as a small rural Georgia town and its influence on Jimmy Carter, and interpreting Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter's impact on the global community <sup>158</sup>

In order to accomplish this mission statement, the National Park Service, in accordance with other presidential sites and with Carter himself, have developed a number of interpretative themes that the site is aiming to convey to each visitor. The purpose of these themes is to "serve as building blocks upon which interpretive services (e.g., exhibits, audiovisual displays, websites, publications, interpretive programs, social media, etc.) and education programs are based."<sup>159</sup> These fourteen themes that can broadly be divided into the categories of Carter's childhood (theme 2, 3, 4), the importance and impact of Plains (themes 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14), Carter as a president (themes 6 and 7), the Carters as a whole (themes 8 and 12), and Carter's military service (theme 1).<sup>160</sup>

Through these themes, the impact of Freeman Tilden's principles can be seen at this site. Each of the stated themes are directly describing what is being displayed on the site, meeting Principle 1. Themes such as #2 and #5 portray Principle 2 in that it includes information relevant to the historical significance of the site. For Principle 3, each of the themes describe to the visitor

---

<sup>158</sup> National Park Service, "Foundation Document: Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" NPS 330/116616, March 2013, page 3

<sup>159</sup> National Park Service, "Foundation Document: Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" NPS 330/116616, March 2013, page 5

<sup>160</sup> Ibid page 5-6

lessons that can be learned from the life of Jimmy Carter, expressly Theme #4, #5 and #7. As stated in the foundation document done by the National Park Service, the aim of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site is to provoke the visitor and have them asking questions by the end of their visit, directly mimicking Principle 4.<sup>161</sup> As all the themes extend across the entirety of Carter's life, Principle 5 is met, addressing the whole man rather than any one phase. Finally, Principle 6 is seen in the fact that there is no separate interpretation space for children, thus not diluting the presentation of Carter that has been given to the adults.

It is with these themes that the National Park Service chooses the lenses through which they portray the life of Jimmy Carter. Through these, Carter becomes a three-dimensional historic figure, defined by his life and childhood. Further, he is able to move into a non-partisan space in which he is not revered by Democrats and at the same time not held in disdain by Republicans.



*Figure 12. Plains Historical Marker*

<sup>161</sup> National Park Service, "Foundation Document: Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" NPS 330/116616, March 2013, page 5

### *Plains High School*

Plains High School was constructed in 1921 by prominent local builder, Ernest Wellons, replacing an earlier school building.<sup>162</sup> The brick Classical Revival and Palladian style building sits on North Bond Street, clearly visible to passers-by and is located just to the west of the hospital where Carter was born. A long, paved driveway leads up to the front façade of the building, dotted with southern pecan trees (see *Figure 13*) With its construction, the high school provided Plains with its largest educational facility and its only primary school serving first through eleventh graders. Twelfth grade was not added as a mandatory graduation requirement to



*Figure 13.* Exterior of Plains High School

---

<sup>162</sup> Jimmy Carter National Historic Site” Plains, Sumter County, Georgia; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987)

the Georgia public school system until 1952.<sup>163</sup> It opened first as an all-white school, with a school for African Americans opening across town. Georgia, at the time, consistently ranked at the bottom of the education ladder, though Plains High School was cited as a model program in 1937.<sup>164</sup> The high school served as a center for community involvement as the auditorium was used to hold a number of community organizational meetings as the only non-denominational meeting places in town.

The high school was one of the first in the area to be completely integrated in 1966, met with apprehension from many of the Plains residents. Y.T Sheffield, principal of Plains High School in the late 1950s and early 1960s, openly opposed integration of the school system. This alarm was reinforced with the opening of the whites only Southland Academy in Americus the following year.<sup>165</sup> This white flight paired with the subsequent neglect and underfunding of Plains High School, resulted in its closing in 1979 with the state of Georgia opting for school consolidation to save funds. Rather quickly, the building fell into disarray and disuse. The National Park Service purchased the building, renovated it and reopened it as a museum in 1996. Further, the school was designated as the State School of Georgia in 1997.<sup>166</sup>

Noted for its “progressive curriculum”, Plains High School is the space in which Principal and Superintendent Julia Coleman played a role in Jimmy Carter’s educational

---

<sup>163</sup> “Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868-1971” Atlanta, Georgia; Georgia State Historic Preservation Office; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service)

<sup>164</sup> O'Brien, William Patrick. *Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District, Georgia*. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991. Page 95

<sup>165</sup> O'Brien page 95

<sup>166</sup> Plains High School Historical Marker, Plains, Georgia

experience as noted by Carter himself.<sup>167</sup> She is quoted as telling her students “Study hard, one of you could become the President of the United States” and one eventually did.<sup>168</sup> It is with this anecdote that the tour of the building, as well as the historic site in general, starts.

Plains High School is the “starting point” of the JCNHS as it is also the site of the Visitor’s Center. Visitors begin by watching a short video in the auditorium, briefly detailing Carter’s life from birth to the present day. The video provides a basis of information that would be needed by the guests in order to understand the significance of the park. Using the auditorium as the space to display this video, it gives the visitors almost a sense of nostalgia for their own time in school, or for a sense of what a 1920s era school in a rural community would have looked like, which is an idea that is vital to the interpretation of Plains High School.

Moving from the video, visitors enter into a re-creation of Coleman’s principal office. Half of the space is devoted to Coleman’s tenure and her work at Plains High School. The other half, though, is allotted for comparing PHS to Wards Chapel Church School, the only school for African American students in Plains. Interpretative pieces show the difference in the number of students per teacher as well as the number of books per library between the two schools (see *Figure 14*). Jimmy Carter himself admitted that it was not until his time on the school board, in his early/mid-thirties, that he began to realize the extent of racial inequality between the two schools in Plains.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup> O’Brien page 38

“Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed December 20, 2020.

<sup>168</sup> Morris page 77.

<sup>169</sup> Carter, Jimmy. *Turning Point: a Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*. Page 42-44





*Figure 14.* Wards Chapel Church School and Plains High School comparison

This interpretation style lends itself to a conservative style of thinking. This kind of interpretation is an example of white American history.<sup>170</sup> With Plains High School only being open and integrated for around thirteen years, there is little to no connection between the Black community in Plains and the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. This sentiment is seen in that African Americans make up 49% of Sumter County's population, but less than 6% of visitors to

<sup>170</sup> Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. "Review Essay: Jim Crow Segregation Remembered, Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory & Identity in Black America Since 1940, Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia." May 2014.

the JCNHS.<sup>171</sup> One Black resident further noted that “I ain’t got nothin’ in that school.”<sup>172</sup>

Carter’s progressive racial stance is emphasized throughout the site especially through the lens of his pro-segregation upbringing. Race relations in Plains as a whole, though, is only truly encountered at Plains High School and minimally throughout the rest of the site. Even here, there are many intricacies to discussing African American issues at an all-white high school.

Memory and history are often at odds with each other.<sup>173</sup> People want to remember the “good” parts of their history, without interacting with its painful parts. Having this interpretation style begins to soften the racial tension that comes with Plains’ social history. It shows racial inequality as a facet of the past. According to one interpreter, “Carter’s relationship to race, the site suggests, was born of the pathological racism of many early-to-mid-twentieth-century white Southerners.”<sup>174</sup> The interpretation makes this very real part of Plains’ history more palatable to the majority white visitors to the site. Rutgers historian Jonathan Scott Holloway asks the important question, “How does one achieve a balance between a record of the past that is unafraid to speak to the challenges that gave the past its true texture?”<sup>175</sup> The Jimmy Carter

---

<sup>171</sup> “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Sumter County, Georgia.” Census Bureau QuickFacts.

Miller, Zachary D.; Rice, William L.; Taff, B. D.; Newman, Peter. 2018. "Understanding Visitor Motivations at Jimmy Carter National Historic Site: A Principal Components Approach." *Heritage* 1, no. 2: 328-334.

<sup>172</sup> Lechner page 79

<sup>173</sup> Holloway, Jonathan Scott. *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940*. Page 8.

<sup>174</sup> Lechner page 80

<sup>175</sup> Holloway page 109



National Historic Site encounters and attempts to answer this question only in this room of the high school, paying little attention to the matter in the rest of the building.

Moving from this room, the visitor enters into a re-creation of Coleman's classroom. (*Figure 15*). This room has been furnished to look as it would have when Coleman taught Carter English lessons. A sound system has recently been updated to include the exact sounds of sneakers, the closing of lockers and the chatters between students which would have been common in the late 1930s.<sup>176</sup> On a number of desks are plaques, each detailing what kind of lessons would have been taught with the addition of personal anecdotes from former students in the form of audio recordings.

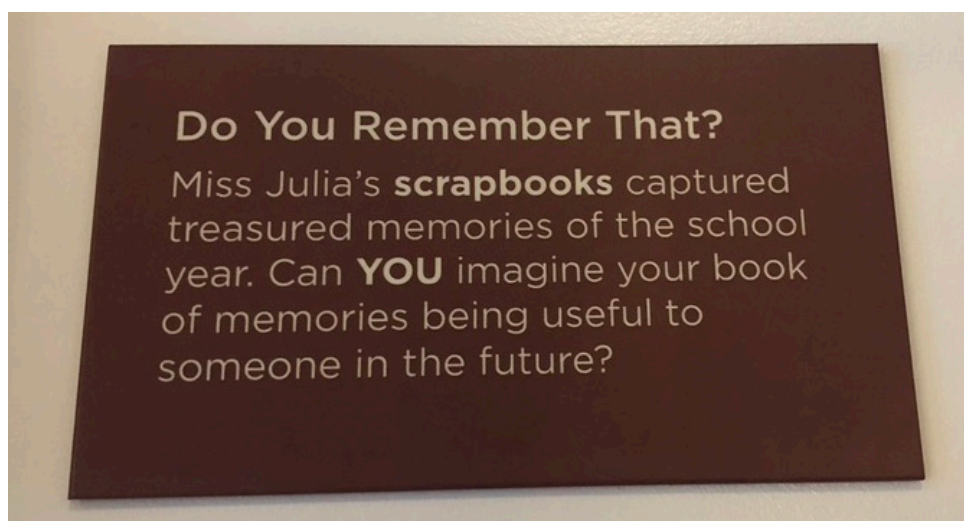


*Figure 15.* Re-creation of Julia Coleman's Classroom

---

<sup>176</sup> Jacob Ross, interview with author, November 21, 2020

As seen specifically in the classroom and in Coleman's office, Plains High School relies on personal nostalgia in their interpretation of this period of Carter's life. In Coleman's office, there are numerous pieces of material culture that recall to a time that is relatable to most. Homecoming dresses, graduation day memories and school lessons move to allow visitors to remember their own time in high school, whether in the recent or far back past. *Figure 16* shows an example of how the site brings the visitors' own memory into the narrative of the space.



*Figure 16.* Interpretative piece in Julia Coleman's office

The sounds of the classroom bring feelings of nostalgia for one's time in grade school. Here, the visitor is asked to remember a period of their childhood. There is a plan in place to one day add a living education demonstration to this room, where a 1930s style lesson would be taught.<sup>177</sup> The addition of this would only further the interpretation's reliance on nostalgia. Childhood is typically remembered through the sights, sounds and smells of school and friends, and not through the politics of a president. This idea is interpreted through a quote from

---

<sup>177</sup> Ibid

Rosalynn Carter— “I took great pride in pleasing my parents, and I loved school as a young child. My teachers, all women, were my idols.”<sup>178</sup> Here, Carter is remembered as a school child rather than a Democratic politician. Nostalgia is noted for inspiring feelings of happiness and comfort.<sup>179</sup> People, today, come to historic sites “not to pay homage, but to satisfy nostalgic feelings of the past.”<sup>180</sup> They look to find a connection between the site and themselves in order to better understand the site’s importance. Visitors are, now, thinking and perceiving Carter through this optimistic lens. They are to carry this notion with them as they move through the rest of the building. University of Idaho psychologist Sam H. Ham notes that successful interpretation lies in the thoughts, meanings, and connections that are made in the audiences’ minds.<sup>181</sup> By making this connection to the visitors’ childhood, Plains High School is better able to convey the narrative of Jimmy Carter that they have chosen.

The main interpretation of the high school is divided into three sections: Jimmy Carter’s impact on the local stage (pre-presidency), national stage (presidency), international stage (post-presidency). Each room builds upon each other, adding to the narrative that Jimmy Carter is just an average southern rural living man who simply happened to find himself in the Oval Office.

---

<sup>178</sup> Carter, Rosalynn. *First Lady from Plains*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994. Page 6.

<sup>179</sup> Tierney, John. “What Is Nostalgia Good For? Quite a Bit, Research Shows.” *The New York Times*. July 8, 2013.

<sup>180</sup> Alderson, William T., and Shirley Payne Low. *Interpretation of Historic Sites*. Walnut Creek, California: Page 24

<sup>181</sup> Ham, Sam H. *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*.

Upon entering the “local stage” room, guests are surrounded with the voices of local Plains residents reminiscing on their old friend Jimmy, filmed during his presidential campaign. The main focus of the room is Carter’s work in his pre-presidency years, namely from his work on the school board (1955-1962) through his governorship (1971-1975). The room neglected to include in the interpretation the segregationist policies that Carter supported during his time on the school board. Instead, his “I say quite frankly to you that the time for racial discrimination is over” quote from his gubernatorial inauguration speech is emphasized.<sup>182</sup> As seen previously, this form of interpretation softens the true nature of race relations in Plains and the role Jimmy Carter initially played in its conservation.

The interpretation of this period of his life hinges on the idea that Jimmy Carter could have chosen anywhere in the world to live but he actively made the choice to come back to Plains. It was his work and his life during his pre-presidency years that inspired him to return to his hometown. It is this idea that sets him apart from any other president of his time. This intense connection between Carter and his hometown is an idea that is meant to resonate with visitors. He is beginning to be portrayed and seen on a more human level.

Additionally, in this room, it is seen that Plains and its people played a major role in getting Carter elected. This grassroots initiative is key to seeing Carter on a similar playing field to that of the visitor. The language used on a multitude of signs in this room makes the interpretation personal. One sign mentions “Imagine someone you know is running for president. How would you help?”<sup>183</sup> He is characterized as someone you know rather than an abstract

---

<sup>182</sup> “Jimmy Carter Inaugural Address for Governor of Georgia.” Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, January 12, 1971.

<sup>183</sup> Wall text “Getting Down to the Grassroots” at Plains High School, Plains, Georgia

politician. This room makes the connection between person and place that is vital to understanding the birthplace narrative.<sup>184</sup>

Moving into the “national stage” room, the theme shifts to Carter’s time in the White House. It is here that you find a recent presidential site necessity: the Oval Office re-creation. A more Carter-specific re-creation finds itself in his presidential library in Atlanta, though the Resolute Desk in Plains still makes its mark (see *Figure 17*). A popular attraction among visitors, this re-creation is synonymous with the office itself rather than the person who holds it. This photo opportunity communicates an important message that is vital to the narrative of Jimmy Carter: any person, regardless of their political affiliations, has the ability to become the next President of the United States.



*Figure 17. Resolute Desk*

---

<sup>184</sup> Lechner, page 73-91



Throughout this entire exhibit, as well as the rest of the high school and historic site, the word “Democrat” is not mentioned once. “Democratic National Convention” appears as a caption to a photo in this room, though that is the only time the phrase is used. (see *Figure 18*) Additionally, the word “Republican” is not used. By this mechanism, Carter, once again, enters into a non-partisan space in which he is not thought of as a Democrat and is not compared to his Republican contemporaries. Here, Carter circumvents defining himself under one singular identity, remaining a political mystery, and sliding into neutral ground



*Figure 18.* Material Culture (Note the use of the phrase “Democratic National Convention” in the bottom right)

Without the inclusion of Republicans or Republican standards, Carter's actions during his presidency are seen in a more positive manner. There is not a piece to juxtapose the decisions that he made. As an interpretative piece, there is a mock voting booth in which visitors could vote on what they believe to be Carter's greatest contributions during his presidency. One can choose between negotiating the Camp David Accords, creating the Department of Education, protecting the environment, protecting the Panama Canal and reforming the federal government. (see *Figure 19*)



*Figure 19.* Mock voting booth in Plains High School

Here, Carter's positive attributes are discussed with scant mention of his less than desirable actions during his presidency. Though this is a commonplace practice among presidential sites, it is not unique to Jimmy Carter. Through this rose-tinted view of his presidency, his slightly below average tenure can be seen in a more constructive manner, as a good-natured man who was doing what he thought was best for his country.

The final interpretation space in Plains High School is the "international stage" room. Here the focus lies on Carter's endeavors in his post-presidency, an era lasting longer than any other former president. It is in the work of his post presidency years that his non-partisan image has significantly been formed. The work of the Carter Center and Habitat for Humanity, among others, is highlighted for visitors. The basis of the interpretation of this current portion of Carter is encapsulated in the quote "My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can, with whatever I have to try to make a difference", which is displayed on a plaque in the center of the room.<sup>185</sup>

It is here that the friendship between Carter and his former Republican opponent Gerald Ford is emphasized. Carter notes in this room as well as at Ford's 2007 funeral that "For myself and for our nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land."<sup>186</sup> It is through this friendship that Carter's bipartisanship is seen. Former presidents are not particularly known for friendships with their political rivals. While this aspect does not necessarily lend itself to Carter being seen as a non-partisan figure, it does facilitate the idea of his overall good

---

<sup>185</sup> Carter, Jimmy. *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*.

<sup>186</sup> "Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's Remarks at the Funeral Service for President Gerald R. Ford." The Carter Center. Accessed December 26, 2020.



character. He is to be loved by fellow Democrats and, at a minimum, tolerated by Republicans for his bipartisan friendships. Carter handled international issues throughout his career and his life. This does not preclude him from issues that are happening in Plains at the same time.

It should be noted, at the time of writing this thesis, Plains High School is closed as a part of the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. There is no clear timetable on when the high school can reopen. Plains High School is following Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines and cannot reopen until the number of active COVID cases in the area decreases.<sup>187</sup> This theme is almost certainly reflective of the area. Park ranger Jacob Ross noted that mask wearing was “rather limited” among townspeople, especially in the city center.<sup>188</sup> According to the Pew Research Center, mask wearing is more prominent among Democratic voters or those who lean Democratic as opposed to Republican voters or those who lean Republican (76% to 53%)<sup>189</sup> Though Sumter County has generally leaned Democratic in the most recent elections, the Democratic edge is a mere 5-7% by 2020 calculations.<sup>190</sup> As was similar at the other buildings on the historic site, there was little signage concerning the ongoing COVID situation. The extent to which it was mentioned at Plains High School was a sign on the front door that stated that the building was closed due to CDC restrictions. Similarly, this minimal notion is found on the National Park Service website for the historic site. (see *Figure 20*). This provides an interesting conundrum for the site. Being owned by the National Park Service and being so intertwined with

---

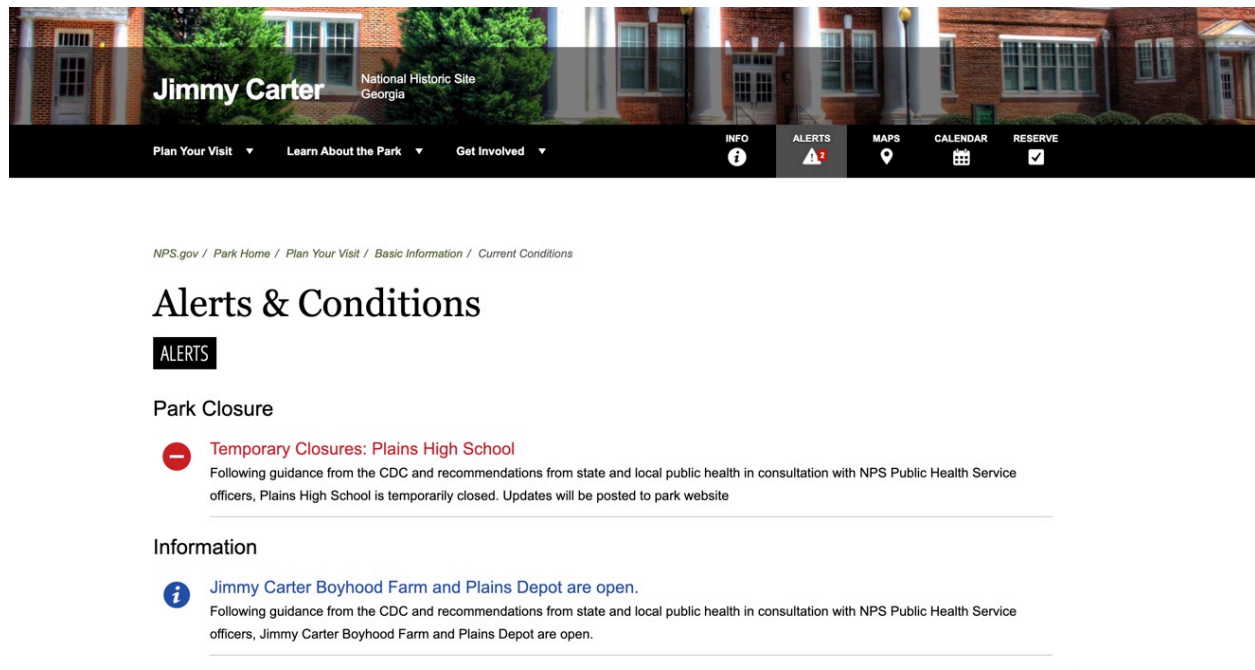
<sup>187</sup> Jacob Ross, interview with author, November 21, 2020

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Igielnik, Ruth. “Most Americans Say They Regularly Wore a Mask in Stores in the Past Month; Fewer See Others Doing It.” Pew Research Center, July 27, 2020.

<sup>190</sup> “Georgia Election Results.” The New York Times. November 3, 2020.

Georgia's only president, the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site has a greater chance to survive this incredibly unpredictable storm than many other house museums and historic sites in this position. COVID-19 is unlikely to change the way that Plains High School and the historic site, as a whole, functions, as nothing truly changed in the first place.



*Figure 20. Jimmy Carter National Historic Site website*

The enactment of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site as well as the interpretation of Plains High School firmly establish Jimmy Carter as a man who is more than simply just a former president. The aspect of nostalgia for small town America is used to bring Carter into this apolitical space. This idea is seen here and in even more prominent positions in the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home and the Plains Train Depot.

## **Chapter Five: The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site: the Boyhood Home and the Plains Train Depot**

### *Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home*

On the edge of the Sumter County line, two miles outside of Plains, lies the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home. The story of this home begins in 1928, when the Carter family moves in. Included in this site are the family home, the commissary, a blacksmith's shop, a windmill, a barn and the home of Jack and Rachel Clark, two African American day laborers who worked for the Carter family. The bungalow style family home is prototypical of middle class south Georgia homes of this time period.<sup>191</sup> (see *Figure 21*) Carter would live in this home until his departure for Georgia Tech in 1941.



*Figure 21. Exterior Shot of Boyhood Home*

---

<sup>191</sup> O'Brien page 67

According to the National Park Service interpretation plan, the Boyhood Home is vital to the understanding of Jimmy Carter. That notion is certainly seen through the interpretation of this home. The basis of the interpretation is that it was this area, specifically the people of this area, that formed his belief systems on issues such as religion or race. Yet, the impression that Jimmy Carter hailed from Plains is a “purposely created myth.”<sup>192</sup> This home is in the town of Archery, not Plains. It is here, in this African American community, that Carter formulated his beliefs. Carter himself believed that he was an Archery native, only venturing into Plains for special occasions.<sup>193</sup> The Carter family had chosen to live in community because it gave them enough space to properly run the family farm and commissary. The Carters were one of only two white families who were living in Archery, the predominately African American community.<sup>194</sup> His mother said, “He had all Black friends... there was no white child within miles of our house.”<sup>195</sup> By emphasizing the idea that Carter came from Plains, a white dominated community, this makes him more palatable to a wider portion of the public. It brings Carter to more of a middle ground where he can be accepted from every side of the aisle.

The three-bedroom home has been restored to its appearance as it was in the late 1930s, prior to the installation of electricity and interior plumbing. The Carter family began to grow the peanuts, among other cash crops, with which Jimmy would become synonymous during his campaign and throughout his presidency. The legacy of this house is largely told through

---

<sup>192</sup> Morris page 83

<sup>193</sup> “Boyhood Farm.” Jimmy Carter, March 31, 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Morris page 83

<sup>195</sup> “My Son, the President: an Interview with Lillian Carter” U.S. News and World Report, March 7, 1977

Carter's own words, an opportunity not seen at other presidential sites. Where his voice is not heard, his writings are quoted on markers. Lechner remarks on this idea, stating "Rarely do historical figures permanently return to the birthplaces that we commemorate in their honor. Birthplace commemorations often take advantage of people's absences in order to rewrite their life stories."<sup>196</sup> Carter tells of his family's perseverance through the Great Depression. Hearing his own personal depictions portrays to the visitor a more affable human being. Not many who visit will be able to relate to the time of the Depression, but this interpretation method creates empathy for the family.

Visitors enter the home through its rear entrance and work their way through. Entering in this direction allows for people to be able to take in the vast landscape, punctuated with farm animals and various structures. The front door has historically been the formal entrance into private homes. Thus, by entering through the back door, it adds to the overall cultivated sense of informality within the home.

The self-guided tour begins in, arguably, the most important room, Jimmy's room. Just as in the Plains Train Depot, visitors are left to draw their own conclusions about Carter's childhood and how that affected him in the future. The National Park Service wants to convey to each visitor from the beginning, through the interpretation of this space, that this is where Carter was introduced to his moral code. The home, the people, the times imparted in him what he would stand for in his later political career. Audio clips reminisce anecdotally on the Carter family and their childhoods, with talk of chores and a day-to-day life. He highlights at multiple points that "life was a struggle during this time, but it was not without its rewards."<sup>197</sup> This

---

<sup>196</sup> Lechner, page 86

<sup>197</sup> Panel text inside the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home, Archery, Georgia

interpretation style is seen throughout the rest of the home, moving through Gloria and Ruth's room, Earl and Lillian's room, the living room, the kitchen and the bathroom.

Throughout the home, Carter's childhood history is told without tying it to a political affiliation. Hard work, cooperation and education among others are discussed on a broad level, in a way that is relatable to all people. These beliefs are not unique to him and are introduced to many during childhood. In the same thought as at Plains High School, childhood is not remembered through political parties or actions. The successful installation of childhood-based nostalgia throughout the interpretation allows for Carter to fall into a non-partisan space of political thought, even into a positive space. He becomes more relatable and is brought down to a human level. Many other presidents of recent memory, such as Donald Trump, have come from families of immense privilege and wealth. By portraying Carter's childhood as one of struggle, the interpretation once again garners empathy and understanding for him and his family as a whole.

In Archery, Carter grew up in a biracial society that was not often seen in 1920s/1930s America. Earl Carter was a staunch segregationist and racial tensions were strong.<sup>198</sup> Anti-African American sentiments were seen throughout Plains and the South.<sup>199</sup> Just as in Plains High School, the interpretation aims to put Carter's life into the context of the social history of the Archery area. This is largely told through the Jack and Rachel Clark House, two African American tenant farmers who lived on site (see *Figure 22*). Jack Clark served as the farm foreman, while Rachel Clark would often look after the children whenever Lillian Carter was

---

<sup>198</sup> Lechner, page 83

<sup>199</sup> Morris page 34

away. Jimmy Carter noted that “Of all the people who lived near us on the farm, Rachel Clark was the most remarkable and made the most significant and lasting impact on me.”<sup>200</sup>



*Figure 22. Jack and Rachel Clark House*

This small house museum serves as a vessel for telling the history of sharecropping and farm life as a whole. While sharecropping was not a uniquely African American experience, nearly 80% of African Americans were sharecroppers or tenants in 1930s Georgia as opposed to fewer than 30% of whites at the same time.<sup>201</sup> Here there is significant discussion on the transition for African Americans from the post-Civil War era to the New South. Period-era newspapers line the wall, adding to the overall nostalgia factor of the historic site.

---

<sup>200</sup> Carter, Jimmy, William George Clark, and William Aldis Wright. *An Hour before Daylight Memories of a Rural Boyhood*

<sup>201</sup> Reinberger, Mark. "The Architecture of Sharecropping: Extended Farms of the Georgia Piedmont." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9



The issue in this interpretation though is that the story of these two African Americans is told as “pawns” in the success of the white Jimmy Carter. They are notable to history solely because of their interactions with a future president.<sup>202</sup> This is similar to what is seen at Plains High School in that a more conservative style of interpretation is employed to make the history behind the home more amiable to a wider audience.<sup>203</sup> The building is not directly next to the Boyhood Home and visitors would have to make an intentional visit to this section of the site. Without prior knowledge of the house’s existence, it would be difficult for visitors to realize that this building is a piece of the history at the site, as there is little signage directing to visitors to interact with the Clark House. If Jack and Rachel Clark were as influential in Carter’s life as Carter makes them out to be, then they, and their story, should be fully included in the interpretation of the site, rather than a side story.

There is a historical marker for the town of Archery as well as a number of abandoned wooden tenant houses approximately a half of a mile down the road from the Boyhood Home, though that is not indicated on the site. There is an opportunity to put the formative years of Jimmy Carter in a much greater social context of the area with the incorporation of that space.

Just as seen in the Plains Train Depot, the Boyhood Home relies heavily on the nostalgia of a small southern town. Rural living is almost synonymous with a “simple” living of an earlier time.<sup>204</sup> The home is off the beaten path, three miles away from the other buildings of the historic

---

<sup>202</sup> Lechner, page 83

<sup>203</sup> Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. “Review Essay: Jim Crow Segregation Remembered, Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory & Identity in Black America Since 1940, Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.”

<sup>204</sup> Newport, Frank. “Americans Big on Idea of Living in the Country.” Gallup, November 23, 2020



site. The landscape does not feature another home (not included in the site) for miles (see *Figure 23*). The area is peaceful, quiet, and remote; a step back from the pace of the “city center” of Plains. The paved paths that weave through the site allow for visitors to move slowly and take in the remoteness of the Boyhood Home. One sign states that “A President Grew Up Here” which adds to the overall nostalgia factor at this site.<sup>205</sup> The secluded environment emphasizes the straightforward nature of Jimmy Carter the politician.



*Figure 23.* Carter Boyhood Home landscape

The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site must balance between putting the president in both a personal context and a historical context, showing both the public and the private sides of his life. The incorporation of the domestic life of the president obliges a visitor to see their former leader as a human being outside of their position. In addition, the home as long been seen

---

<sup>205</sup> Panel text outside the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home, Archery, Georgia

as an apolitical space. This is seen through the idea of separate spheres, one sphere for the domestic space and the other for a political space. The outside world of Plains was the public realm, and this home is the private space of the Carters. Through the preservation of this home site, it reinforces the curated idea of Jimmy Carter as apolitical himself.

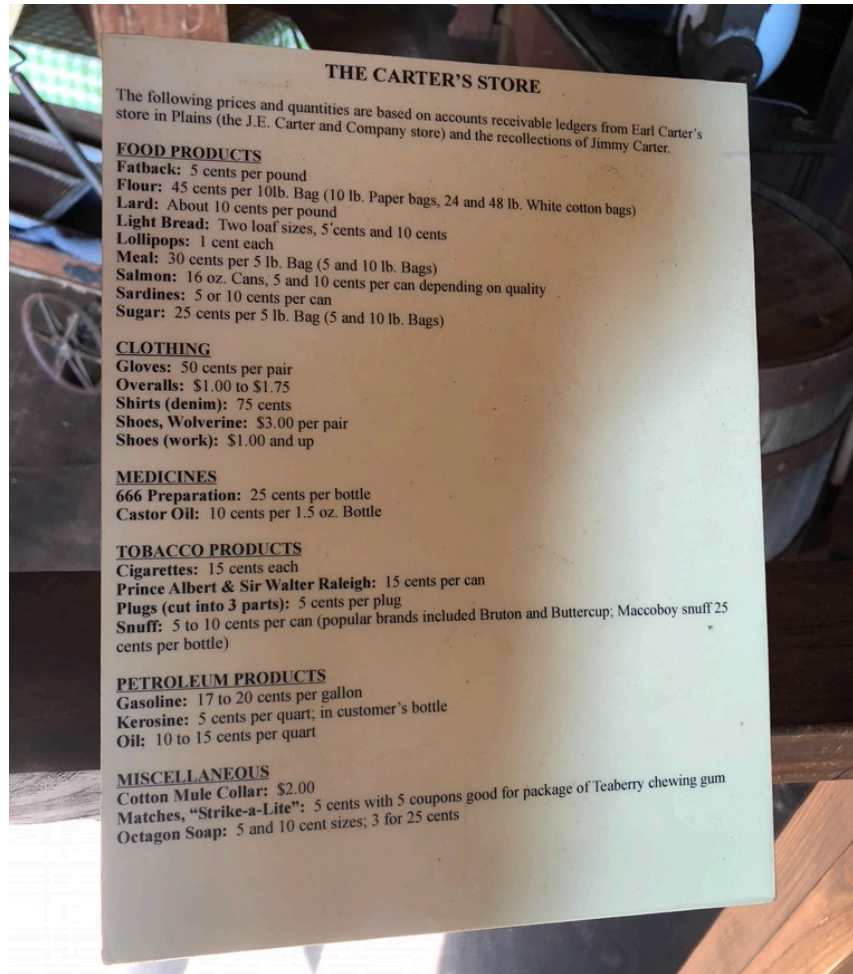
The concept of nostalgia is also seen in the language that is used on a multitude of signs throughout the farm. Moving outside of the home, there are a number of wayside exhibits that tell the story of southern farm life, especially that during the Great Depression era. With titles such as “Winds of Change”, “Legacy of an Outdoor Childhood” and “Always a Reckoning”, this signage reinforces the idea that his childhood and the landscape around him shaped who he is today.<sup>206</sup> The language is also indicative of a positive thinking of Carter’s upbringing, which could influence how visitors perceive the site.

In the commissary, there is a note of prices for food products, clothing, medicines, tobacco products, petroleum products and other items in the early 1930s. (see *Figure 24*). This utilizes feelings of nostalgia for a “simpler time” in history. The commissary also served as a place of chores for young Jimmy Carter, as he was to work there every Saturday morning.<sup>207</sup> While this may not be a common chore for visitors coming through the site, it does elicit feelings of nostalgia for one’s own childhood memories.

---

<sup>206</sup> Panel Text at Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home, Archery, Georgia

<sup>207</sup> Morris, page 27



*Figure 24. Price list in Commissary*

The Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home puts Carter's life in the context of the Great Depression and 1930s America. Here, the interpretation portrays the narrative that at the site, during this time, Carter was provided with exemplary models of morality that he would take with him throughout his life and career. The interpretation of this space raises an interesting question: if this environment was so influential in creating this American president, then why hasn't anyone else from the area risen to a level of such prominence?

### *Plains Train Depot*

Further intertwining himself with the town, Jimmy Carter chose to base his 1976 presidential campaign out of Plains. In finding a suitable place for such a cause, there was only one serious option, the Plains Train Depot. At the northwest corner of Hudson and Main streets, as noted inside, it was the only public building in town that had indoor plumbing.

The Depot was constructed in 1888 to accommodate a 37-mile railroad owned by Savannah, Americus and Montgomery Railroad and is the oldest surviving building in Plains.<sup>208</sup> The building was used as a warehouse once passenger service had been discontinued in the 1950s and bought by the Carter peanut farm for storage use in the early 1970s.<sup>209</sup> The timing of this purchase coincided with Carter's announcement of his candidacy for president on December 12, 1974. The Depot was small, cramped and "totally inadequate for serving as anything other than a national symbol."<sup>210</sup> Though his official national campaign headquarters was based out of Atlanta, the Plains Train Depot provided a near perfect background for his small-town aesthetic, opening on Easter Sunday 1976. Operated by friends and family of the Carters, it was here that campaign announcements would be made. In choosing this space, Carter noted that "for far too long, political leaders have been isolated from the people. They have made decisions from an ivory tower. Now it is time for this chasm between people and government to be bridged, and for

---

<sup>208</sup> "The Plains Depot." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 2020.

<sup>209</sup> O'Brien page 72-73

<sup>210</sup> Morris page 83

American citizens to join in sharing our nation's future."<sup>211</sup> Coming from a small town emulated and reinforced the American Dream ideal, that would resonate with people across the country. Thousands of visitors a day made their way down to Plains to catch a glimpse of the presidential hopeful.<sup>212</sup> With its wood framing and board and batten siding, the Depot quickly became a physical representation of his small-town southern roots (see *Figure 25*). Over one hundred Plains residents boarded an Amtrak train departing from the Depot for Inauguration Day 1977 to see Carter sworn in.<sup>213</sup> Additionally, the town gathered at the Depot to welcome the Carters back to Plains after his departure from the White House in 1981.



*Figure 25. Exterior of Plains Train Depot*

---

<sup>211</sup> Carter, Jimmy. *Why Not the Best? the First Fifty Years*

<sup>212</sup> O'Brien page 72-73

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.



Just as in other buildings on the National Historic Site, the Plains Depot relies on nostalgia in its interpretation. Even before entering the building, this sentiment can be seen. On the left-side porch, there are two rocking chairs to sit back in, relax and watch the trains roll into town. While this ideal is not only in the Plains area, it is synonymous with rural living and “simpler times”. The nostalgia of a time “when everything was easy” is the center of the interpretation of Jimmy Carter and Plains as a whole. Moving inside, the wistfulness continues.

The Depot features a self-guided tour, with no National Park Service ranger being on site. Therefore, guests are meant to reach their own conclusions concerning this presidential candidate. Visitors are initially met with campaign buttons, posters, stickers and other paraphernalia. This kind of memorabilia is one of the oldest ways to show political pride in the United States, with “Long Live the President” pins being worn at George Washington’s inauguration.<sup>214</sup> Carter’s election was its own cultural moment and people, especially in Georgia, remember that moment. In addition, political campaign buttons can help the candidate solidify their image. Jimmy Carter ran on a platform that he was a Washington outsider, that he would bring small town, southern values into the White House. Slogans like “The Grin Will Win” and “Gimme Jimmy” were small yet memorable ways for the public to remember him. He portrayed himself as a peanut farmer with a wide grin and one of his more popular campaign buttons, seen in the Depot, reflects that notion. (see *Figure 26*). These political buttons are a tangible sign of the times in which he ran. They do not mention his political ideology, but mark 1976 as a year to remember in American history.

---

<sup>214</sup> “Inaugural Buttons.” George Washington's Mount Vernon. Accessed December 2020.



*Figure 26. “The Grin Will Win” Campaign Button*<sup>215</sup>

Moving forward, visitors see a description of the history of the Depot itself, with the aforementioned bathroom anecdote, as well as a small backstory on Carter himself. This small, but important, area emphasizes the small-town, grassroots nature of the Carter presidential campaign before digging into the details of it. Walking into the wood-framed section of the depot, the sounds of campaign commercials occupy the room. These sounds originate from a 1970s-esque encased television that visitors are invited to sit in front of to take in. (See *Figure 27*).

---

<sup>215</sup> The Plains Depot.” National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 2020



*Figure 27. 1970s encased television*

The interpretation in this scene seems to be distant and the reverse of what is seen on the greater American political scene today. Today, the Republican Party is the party of the rural voter and of small-town America.<sup>216</sup> The same base that facilitated Carter's election, today consistently casts their votes for Republican candidates.<sup>217</sup> Here, the National Park Service must rely heavily on the nostalgia factor in order to reinforce their interpretation of Carter. The average age of National Park visitors trends around age 55, meaning that the majority of visitors passing through the Depot could remember having this type of television in their own living

---

<sup>216</sup> Kotkin, Joel. "The Republican Party's Fatal Attraction To Rural America." *Forbes Magazine*, May 1, 2012

Evans, Sean. "Why Rural Voters Vote Republican." *The Jackson Sun*, March 15, 2019.

<sup>217</sup> McKee, Seth C. "Rural Voters and the Polarization of American Presidential Elections."



room.<sup>218</sup> This nostalgia from childhood is similar to what is seen at Plains High School. Fond memories from childhood allow for a more positive view of the campaign when moving through the Depot. To the same end, even if one did not have a TV like this one or was not yet alive during the campaign, it gives visitors an experience and feeling of the era and the type of campaign that was being run. His election, a definitively political situation, is pitched in an apolitical manner.

The Plains Train Depot does follow a common convention in that it only describes the positive attributes of his campaign, with no true discussion of the controversies that surrounded it. The interpretation here is meant to capture the buzz and excitement around Carter's campaign. This rose-tinted perspective of the campaign paints a vision of Carter for the visitor without acknowledging the full story. There was significant opposition to Carter's southern roots, his evangelicalism, his interview with *Playboy* magazine and his indecisiveness in 1976 that are not fully addressed at the Depot.

The Depot has been described as the "singular symbol of the Plains community, the Carter campaign, and the successful promotion of an individual community member to the Presidency of the United States."<sup>219</sup> It is a near perfect coalescence of the elements that make up the story of Jimmy Carter. He is a small-town southern man, not to be remembered by his political convictions, but by his roots.

---

<sup>218</sup> Wilson, Dustin Lee. "BABY BOOMER VISITORS IN U.S. NATIONAL PARKS: EXPLORING AGE CHANGES, ACTIVITY SELECTION AND TRANSPORTATION MODE CHOICE." July 2015.

<sup>219</sup> Barthold, Elizabeth, "Plains Train Depot" Written Historical Descriptive Data. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS No. GA – 2209; accessed December 18, 2020)

### *Carter Compound*

When people visit presidential homesites, often what is seen is a lavish, extravagant home. Barack Obama lives in a \$8.1 million home in D.C., as well as an equally lavish \$11.75 million home in Martha's Vineyard.<sup>220</sup> Similarly, Bill Clinton lives in Whitehaven, an estimated \$5.3 million mansion just outside of Washington, D.C.<sup>221</sup> That is not the case for the small-town Carter family. Carter has stated— "I don't see anything wrong with it; I don't blame other people (other former presidents) for doing it. It had just never been my ambition to be rich."<sup>222</sup> The Carters live in the same home in which they lived since the early 1960s, the only home they have ever owned in Plains. Assessed at just \$167,000, the simple one-story ranch-style house remains virtually untouched since the end of Carter's presidency. (see *Figure 28*) Even the fence that surrounds the home is reused, once surrounding Richard Nixon's home in South Florida, bolstering his frugality.<sup>223</sup> The Carter Home reflects Carter's understated personality seen in both his private and personal life. The lives of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter are intertwined with the narrative of the American rural South. The home was constructed by a friend of a friend of the Carters and "represents the tangible success of his work with the local family peanut

---

<sup>220</sup> Martin, Emmie. "The Obamas Just Bought an \$8.1 Million Mansion in Washington, D.C. - Take a Look Inside." CNBC, June 2, 2017.; Goldsborough, Bob. "Obamas Buy Martha's Vineyard Mansion for \$11.75 Million." *chicagotribune.com*. Chicago Tribune, December 5, 2019.

<sup>221</sup> Holland, Oscar. "Hillary Clinton Offers Rare Glimpse inside Family's DC Home," May 30, 2019

<sup>222</sup> Sullivan, Kevin, and Mary Jordan. "The Un-Celebrity President: Jimmy Carter Shuns Riches, Lives Modestly in His Georgia Hometown." *The Washington Post*. August 17, 2018.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

business.”<sup>224</sup> This is the home in which he began to rise through the ranks of local politics, to state politics, to the highest office and then returning as a private citizen. The home itself signifies the model of the American Dream. The American Dream that can be achieved by any person, regardless of where they were born or of their political beliefs.



*Figure 28. Carter Compound (courtesy of the Library of Congress)*

---

<sup>224</sup> O'Brien, page 102

On the property as well is the Gnann House, a 1920s era home once owned by neighbors of the Carters. (see *Figure 29*) Acquired by the General Services Administration (GSA) following the end of Carter's presidency, the house is currently being used by the Secret Service detail that is being provided to the Carters for the remainder of their lives. Following the passing of the Carters, the GSA will transfer the property to the National Park Service, who will include the house in their interpretation of the life of Jimmy Carter.<sup>225</sup> Accompanied by the Gnann Carriage House, the Colonial Revival style house follows the same understated vernacular nature of the Carter house, though there have been a number of additions made to the home to accommodate Secret Service needs.<sup>226</sup>



*Figure 29.* Gnann House

---

<sup>225</sup> To Establish the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District in the State. Of Georgia, and for other purposes. Public Law 100-206, 101 Stat. 1436 (1987)

<sup>226</sup> "Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" Plains, Sumter County, Georgia; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2012)

As the Carters are still living on the property, the Carter Compound is not currently open to the public for tours. As per the Development Concept Plan put forth by the National Park Service, the property will one day be converted into a house museum dedicated to his life and legacy. The Carter family wishes for the site to be an “appreciation for the natural world we lived in”<sup>227</sup> The meaning of the life that Jimmy and Rosalynn lived would be experienced through the objects and material culture, both tangible and intangible, that visitors could find in and around the site. The Gnann House and the Gnann Carriage House will be transformed into a visitor center for the home. Due to the size of the compound, there would be a limit of around 100 visitors per day.<sup>228</sup>

As park ranger Jacob Ross noted, when the time comes for this change to begin, initial visitors are likely to be “disappointed”.<sup>229</sup> As previously mentioned, the president is expected to live in a home full of grandeur. For Jimmy Carter, that is simply not the reality. Former politicians on both sides of aisle are paid handsomely and their lifestyle reflects that. By Carter remaining in his simple farm boy lifestyle, he separates himself from these people. Politicians are often seen as out of this world characters, too far off the ground to be touched by everyday people. This compound brings Carter back down to Earth, a regular man living in a very ordinary home. It is to this end that Ross could be wrong in his assessment. When the first visitors come

---

<sup>227</sup> “Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for The Carter Home and Garden.” Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. National Park Service; US Dept of Interior, September 2019.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Jacob Ross, interview with the author, November 21, 2020

to the home, they will not be expecting a grand mansion. Carter's humility has been well reported on and will not come as a shock to visitors.

This house could be owned and lived in by any working- or middle-class family and yet it is owned by a former president. Here, he is not seen as a Democratic politician, but as a friendly neighbor, with the exception of his "Biden-Harris 2020" hanging out of his security gate. A former Democratic president supporting the Democratic candidate for president is not a particularly bold statement, but it is a political statement, nonetheless. Yet, even with this statement, it is so mundane and conventional. Campaign signs in the front yard of a homesite are so acceptable that it seems quaint at the Carter Compound.

## *Plains*

Plains itself is interpreted within the history of Jimmy Carter. Any building remotely related to Carter and his life is denoted and memorialized. The historic site encompasses nearly the entire town and makes up a majority of Plains' economy. The town is fixed in time, in the 1970s, with "Elect Jimmy Carter" posters hanging in numerous parts of the landscape. A multitude of stores in the downtown area sell Carter era memorabilia and campaign paraphernalia (see *Figure 30*). The Plains Historic Inn in downtown Plains features seven rooms each commemorating a different decade of Carter's life from the 1920s-1980s.



*Figure 30.* Downtown Plains

Carter defines Plains yet at the same time it is Plains that defines Carter. From his first state senate campaign through both presidential trails, Carter portrayed himself as a small-town Georgia peanut farmer and, as such, this would be how he was characterized in political ads and



cartoons. Plains commemorates Carter in this same manner. Peanut statues dot the downtown area, providing a photo opportunity for visitors to remember their time in Plains. One resides behind the Plains Train Depot, welcoming visitors into town. (see *Figure 31*) One peanut in particular was gifted to Plains by the state of Indiana during the Democratic primaries in 1976. (see *Figure 32*). Anecdotally, this peanut was originally placed in the middle of town and Carter disliked it so much that he had it moved to the northern edge of town. When Carter switched church memberships from Plains Baptist to Maranatha Baptist, he, then, had to drive past the peanut every Sunday, as it is the only way to reach Maranatha Baptist Church.<sup>230</sup>



*Figure 31.* Peanut behind Plains Depot



*Figure 32.* Peanut with Carter-esque grin

---

<sup>230</sup> Jacob Ross, interview with author, November 21, 2020



Throughout Carter's political career, he would note that "to understand me, you have to understand my family."<sup>231</sup> To this end, there are a number of sites in Plains that focus on other members of the Carter family. For one, the Wise Sanitarium was renamed to the Lillian G. Carter Health and Rehabilitation Center in 1976, following his election win. Lillian Carter had worked a nurse in the Sanitarium for many years, even giving birth to Carter in one of its rooms. It was the construction of this hospital that brought Lillian Carter to the Plains area in the first place, giving her a job and setting off the chain of events that eventually led to Jimmy Carter in the White House. Today, the center is still a functioning nursing home with a green historical marker on the front lawn noting its history. The center is not included in the National Historic Site, though it does add to the narrative that Jimmy Carter (and his family) has a long history in Plains and are emblematic of the town itself.

More notable is the Billy Carter Gas Station, once owned by the younger brother of the former president. The lot had long been considered an "informal social hall" for the men of Plains.<sup>232</sup> Located on Church Street, the gas station became a symbol for the "world's most public drunk" with a "cantankerous personality and colorful and controversial quips."<sup>233</sup> When journalists were looking for insights into the life of candidate Jimmy Carter in 1976, they looked

---

<sup>231</sup> Morris Page 59.

<sup>232</sup> O'Brien page 96

<sup>233</sup> Pearson, Richard. "BILLY CARTER, EX-PRESIDENT'S BROTHER, DIES OF CANCER." The Washington Post. September 26, 1988.

to Billy, who owned a gas station in town (see *Figure 33*). Billy Carter personifies the stereotype of southern rural living with the Associated Press branding him a “professional redneck.”<sup>234</sup>



*Figure 33. Billy Carter Gas Station Exterior*

The replica museum includes Billy’s eccentric clothing as well as cases of his own name branded beer “Billy Beer”, launched during the height of Jimmy’s presidency. This beer venture was not ultimately successful (it folded in 1978) though it soon became a pop culture icon with unopened cans of the beer worth a few hundred dollars.<sup>235</sup> The beer represented a moment in time, a physical representation of the buzz around the Jimmy Carter presidency. The museum capitalizes on the nostalgia of the time to tell the story of Billy Carter. It is included within the boundaries of the National Historic District but not within the historic site. Jimmy Carter,

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid

<sup>235</sup> Pearson, *The Washington Post* September 26, 1988

though, contributes the majority of money used for the museum's upkeep.<sup>236</sup> Billy Carter and his actions inside and outside the world of politics further reinforces the ideals of Jimmy Carter and his non-partisan appearance. The gas station was and is a characteristic of any small town and the nostalgia that comes along with it. It reflects an American way of life that has almost been lost in modern times. Billy's southern charm by proxy benefited Carter's interpretation. All sides of the aisle can relate to an outlandish relative, making Carter more personable and less political.

Each piece of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site works together to portray a particular narrative about the man of Jimmy Carter. The establishment of the site lays out exactly how the National Park Service intends on telling his story. It is a carefully constructed version of Carter that Carter has established for himself throughout his career. Nostalgia is the prominent strategy used to connect the interpretation at each of these pieces together. Plains High School recalls childhood, while making the former president palatable to all sides of the political spectrum. It contextualizes his presidency without mentioning the word "Democratic" a single time. The Boyhood Home relies on the nostalgia of small town, rural America. It portrays the home as the coalescence of a struggle and hard work on the part of Jimmy Carter. The Plains Train Depot accentuates the building as a physical representation of his roots through pieces of material culture such as campaign buttons and encased televisions. Altogether, these parts pitch Jimmy Carter as a non-partisan man, a morally correct and upstanding citizen. Through this, his visible political activities are seen as normal and quaint. This is an artifice, emphasizing the positive aspects of his life while omitting the flawed.

---

<sup>236</sup> "Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" Plains, Sumter County, Georgia; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2012)

## **Chapter 5—Conclusion**

Interpretation is an art that, as Tilden noted, when presented “has the qualities of a story and...lies in the thoughts, meanings and connections made in the audience’s mind.”<sup>237</sup> In essence, Jimmy Carter is the story of the American Dream. One man rising from the hot, peanut farms of south Georgia and working his way into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Carter portrayed himself as a citizen-president and it is by that nature that he was elected. The interpretation at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Park emphasizes this point. The American Dream in itself is non-partisan. This national ethos is meant to be the belief that, through hard work, all individuals are entitled to the opportunity for success and for climbing up the social ladder. This lends itself to the interpretation at Jimmy Carter’s historic site. If the interpretation here is to be believed, then Carter is the blueprint for how the American people can reach success. He is the idealistic standard for model citizenship, especially with his ideas of civil virtue, humanitarianism, Racial politics and Christianity. This narrative is a gambit of sorts, not necessarily wrong but far from the unadorned truth. It is a construction of historical reality. Jimmy Carter is all of these idealistic, abstracted concepts and much more that simply is not discussed at this site.

Collective public memory, especially that of public figures, tend to mirror the ideas of modern people. This creates a “usable past” that serves the needs of the present.<sup>238</sup> John F. Kennedy remarked, “History, after all, is the memory of a nation...history is the means by which

---

<sup>237</sup> Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*

<sup>238</sup> “The Search for a Usable Past.” Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, October 2001.

a nation establishes its sense of identity and purpose.”<sup>239</sup> At the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site, a particular kind of historical memory is created. This collective memory can bring people together through a common sense of community and association.

The main function of the collective memory at this historic site is to depoliticize a figure who is distinctly political. In a highly politicized environment, the interaction between interpretation and public collective memory works to make Carter attractive to a wider audience from most political backgrounds. Therefore, the past that is told here is “usable” as Carter does fit within this mold. This aspect of the useable past is in favor for consensus-based politics.<sup>240</sup> One of the remarkable aspects of the Carter campaign is that he attracted a wide array of voters especially from different races and classes. Carter spent a considerable amount of his campaign time appealing to every group from feminists to union workers. This fact aids in the interpretation that is presented at his historic site. His campaign strategy is employed in order for Carter to appear non-partisan to the visitor. This presidential site is aiming to illustrate a greater picture of American history.

Presidential sites have always found themselves at the center of the historic preservation movement in the United States. Mount Vernon was the first site of historic preservation in this country. Monticello, home of Thomas Jefferson, followed closely behind it. Both sites have undergone transformations in their interpretations in recent years to accommodate both the positive and the negative sides to their political careers. Through the preservation of these initial presidential sites, more hometown societies sprung up in order to commemorate those national

---

<sup>239</sup> “John F. Kennedy: On History.” AMERICAN HERITAGE, February 1, 2021.

<sup>240</sup> McClosky, Herbert. "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 58, no. 2 (1964): 361-82.

leaders. Franklin D. Roosevelt started the tradition of the presidential library, thus shifting presidential commemoration into a modern world. With this transition, every president, not just those the public remembers, has his own historic site. Legislation passed in the 1960s allowed for the government to take control of the preservation of the heritage of the American president. The vast majority of presidential libraries (with the exception of the planned Barack Obama library) are under the control of the National Archives and Records Administration. Presidential historic sites, with the exception of a few, are likewise under the control of the National Park Service.

Though this site is telling and preserving the story of one specific man, it is also preserving the cultural heritage of the American presidency as a whole as well as of small-town America. Noted as an interpretative theme, the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site is intending to show how life was like in rural 1930s Georgia.<sup>241</sup> This transforms what was once a private realm into public heritage. The American Presidency produces a shared heritage among its citizens. With the site being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has been designated by the Secretary of the Interior as “having exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.”<sup>242</sup> The abstraction of collective memory is on physical display at the historic site. Each individual piece of the Carter historic site is meant to place him outside of political territory and make him engaging to each visitor despite their political leanings. The Boyhood Home illustrates Carter’s childhood in the time of the Great Depression. Plains High School shows the dramatic arch of Carter’s life from schoolboy to

---

<sup>241</sup> Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for the Carter Home and Garden.” Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. National Park Service; US Dept of Interior, September 2019.

<sup>242</sup> National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service

president. The Plains Train Depot interprets his presidential campaign in the scenery of small-town America.

Plains became an instant tourist attraction, almost overnight. The site hinges on nostalgia, both for our own past and a greater American past, in its interpretation. The nostalgia of a small southern town permanently in the past is key to this portrayal of Carter. The depoliticized nature of childhood and the greater “past” is how Carter is able to be seen in an apolitical light. The past has a known value when there is political or cultural discord. People look to the past in hope of finding an answer for the future.

In relation to sub-question 3 of the initial research question, the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site has the uncommon problem of immortalizing a living figure. Carter himself has played a significant role in the creation of his historic site. He essentially has been able to tell his own story, choosing what to include and what to leave out. He and Rosalynn have personally signed off on plans for what is to come of their home in the future. This action is breaking from the tradition set by previous presidents. Admittedly, though, no other president has had a longer post-presidency than Jimmy Carter. Most presidents have waited until after they had passed away for their life to be canonized. Carter has had a hand in the vast majority of the decisions that have been made at the site. The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site is a living, breathing piece of preservation. The fabled “Old South” runs succinctly through the town of Plains. This small Southern town is the unlikely home of a former president. The site is a tribute to the cultural heritage of American democracy. As the United States has evolved, the country has transformed into a partisan nation with a particular political culture. This political culture is bound to show up in presidential historic sites.

Presidential sites have the ability to influence each of the visitors who come to the area. The interpretation at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site portrays the former president as a non-partisan American figure. In reality, this is simply not the case. Though he is far from a mainstream politician, Carter has continually been a partisan person. He was a Democratic politician, and he continues to be a Democratic man in his private life. Jimmy Carter's current non-partisan public image is not an accident. Carter carefully cultivated this image from early on his political career. It can be seen in his first campaign for the state senate when he described himself as a "naïve thirty-eight-year-old farmer and small-town businessman" to when Carter and the "Peanut Brigade" campaigned on the sentimental slogan "The Grin Will Win."<sup>243</sup> He was to be seen as a populist, yet non- partisan folk hero from a small town in Georgia. Yet, during his gubernatorial and presidential campaigns, he played into party politics, namely into race-based politics, in order to garner support from voters. He has routinely spoken out against the policies of Republican presidents such as Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump.<sup>244</sup> He ran his political campaigns on the basis of his moral character stating that he would never tell a lie. Later, he denounced Donald Trump as being "very careless with the truth."<sup>245</sup> He has made his

---

<sup>243</sup> Carter, Jimmy. *Turning Point: a Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*. Page XIX

<sup>244</sup> Quinn, Matthew C. "Carter Criticizes Reagan's Gulf Policy." UPI. October 17, 1987.

Duster, Chandelis. "Jimmy Carter Says Reelection of Trump Would Be a 'Disaster'." CNN. September 19, 2019.

<sup>245</sup> CBS News. "Former President Jimmy Carter: Trump 'Is Very Careless with the Truth.'" August 28, 2018.



opinion known on candidates within his own party, citing his distaste for the Clintons and his particular liking of Bernie Sanders.<sup>246</sup>

Carter's presidential legacy, though, is marred by "what-ifs": what if he had won the Nobel Peace Prize during his presidency for his work with the Camp David Accords, what if he hadn't been president directly after the end of the Vietnam War with intense amounts of public distrust in the government, what if he had won a second term? All of these issues affect how he is seen on the modern political scene. His failures in office will bar him from being considered one of the greats in American history.

Published just two weeks after the 1980 election, *TIME* magazine said about Carter, "In a sense Carter was an irrelevance in his own party. He was never a Democratic leader by blood or inclination—not really. He never sought, like Franklin Roosevelt or Lyndon Johnson to preside as paterfamilias over the great brawling Democratic coalition."<sup>247</sup> With Carter becoming a Democratic Party outcast, few candidates aimed for his support in national elections. As the host of *The Tonight Show*, Johnny Carson poked fun at the Carter legacy, saying "Having your campaign endorsed by Jimmy Carter is like having your ministry endorsed by Jimmy Swaggart."<sup>248</sup> Even as a former president, he was not given a prominent speaking role at the 1984 Democratic National Convention. His inability to secure a second term branded him a failure, with few aiming for his support in national elections. In the 1988 presidential election,

---

<sup>246</sup> Hawkins, Derek. "Y'all See Why I Voted for Him?": Jimmy Carter Says He Was a Bernie Sanders Supporter." *The Washington Post*. April 29, 2019.

<sup>247</sup> Morrow, Lance. "Nation: Is There Life After Disaster?" *Time*. Time Inc., November 17, 1980. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,950488,00.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Brinkley, Douglas. "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The "Hands On" Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President." *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (1996): 505-29.

Joe Biden was seen as a “radical” for asking for Carter’s endorsement.<sup>249</sup> As Carter stated later, “I had committed the unforgivable sin of losing.”<sup>250</sup>

To that same end, Jimmy Carter does not encourage an emotional reaction in either the Democratic or Republican parties as contemporary politicians like Bill Clinton or Ronald Reagan do in their respective parties. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton have eerily similar backgrounds, yet their political careers are not paid the same attention. Both are from small towns (Plains and Hope) in southern states (Georgia and Arkansas). Both served as governors of the respective states directly before running a successful campaign for president. Both pursued a “New Democratic” goal of renegotiating the New Deal for modern times.<sup>251</sup> Yet two term Clinton is consistently a prominent figure on the Democratic political scene, despite his well-known moral failings, while Carter is rarely mentioned in Democratic conventions. In Clinton’s first successful campaign for the presidency, he had to defend himself from being typecast as “another southern governor who would mismanage the nation’s prosperity.”<sup>252</sup>

In recent years, Jimmy Carter has experienced a renaissance of sorts. From being wholeheartedly rejected by the American people in 1980, Carter has become a generally likeable political figure. 40% of Americans believe that he has done his best work (i.e., his philanthropic work with the Carter Center) in his post presidency career.<sup>253</sup> One visitor to the Jimmy Carter

---

<sup>249</sup> Morris page 300

<sup>250</sup> Bourne page 42

<sup>251</sup> Morgan, Iwan. "Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and the New Democratic Economics."

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Gass, Nick, and Paul Demko. “Poll: Jimmy Carter Did the Best Post-White House Work.” POLITICO, November 5, 2015.

National Historic Site noted that “everybody likes Jimmy Carter, even people who a long time ago may not have liked him politically.”<sup>254</sup>

Due to his general “likeability”, there has been a modern-day pilgrimage to Plains in order to visit with the former president. Those Democratic candidates who visit aim to garner his support and ultimately receive the same kind of wide array of voters that carried Carter to the presidency. In the 2020 campaign season alone, candidates Amy Klobuchar, Cory Booker and Pete Buttigieg made the trip to South Georgia (see *Figure 34*). These visitors are notably the moderate wing of the current Democratic Party. Though Carter had previously voiced support for progressive candidates, those are not the ones who are looking for his support. Indeed, there are the relatively inexperienced candidates, those who are looking to mimic Carter’s unthinkable rise to power. Establishment or moderate Democrats are looking to court the former president. They are looking to gain grassroots support in the same way Carter had done. This is the kind of support that more radical candidates such as Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders do not need and thus do not look to Carter. This is not to say that Carter is the only politician that these candidates are looking towards. Conversations with former Democratic officials like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama do happen. Yet, Jimmy Carter, for all his blandness, is a safer Democratic presidential heritage to cling to rather than the public memory of the more influential (and more controversial figures like Clinton and Obama.

---

<sup>254</sup> Judd, Alan. "Carter celebrates 75th birthday: There's no place like home, he says." *The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, October 2, 1999



Figure 34. Carter and Pete Buttigieg in early March 2020

The collective American memory may be that Jimmy Carter was a failed president. His life may be reduced down to his political ineptitude. Former Carter White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan noted that “Carter is a complex man. And we began much to our dismay that even by 1980—after all the millions of words that had been written and all the thousands of hours on television—the American people still did not have a clear picture of who he was.”<sup>255</sup> He was ultimately incompatible with Washington, but he was suitable for the small southern town of Plains, Georgia. The town welcomed him back in with open arms following his defeat. Following the 1980 election, an aide to President Reagan spoke of Carter, “Ultimately, while the

---

<sup>255</sup> Hamilton Jordan quoted in *Prophet from Plains: Jimmy Carter and His Legacy*. Frye Gaillard and David C. Carter. University of Georgia Press, 2007.

American people overwhelmingly rejected President Carter, they continue to like Jimmy Carter personally.”<sup>256</sup>

Carter returned to his home, determined to live the “Truman post-presidency,” one in which he did not enrich himself.<sup>257</sup> Had this been the end of Carter’s public life, he would have been remembered only for his failures. Yet, Carter transformed his presidential library into a site that was also a humanitarian aid center. In this, he reinforced the populist values of his campaign days. He had a sincere desire to help people. Douglas Brinkley, a prominent historian who was one of the first to call for a revision to Carter’s legacy, noted “former critics on both the left and the right were forced to concede that Carter at the very least was a superb president emeritus.”<sup>258</sup>

Carter’s relative irrelevance and his ability to remain mysterious has allowed for this interpretation at his historic site to grow and thrive. Carter is a white liberal southerner, and this could be seen as intensely problematic to modern day conservatives yet that is not the case. In part, the interpretation at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site deemphasizes just how problematic he could have been perceived. Most Americans are too young to remember the Carter presidency firsthand and most think of him through his humanitarian post-presidency. At the site, his political actions are not once described as “Democratic”, and his typically conservative ideals are not depicted as such either. He is pitched to the visitor as a morally upstanding citizen, one without a political party.

---

<sup>256</sup> Baker, Peter. “Was Jimmy Carter the Most Underrated President in History?” The New York Times, June 5, 2018.

<sup>257</sup> “Jimmy Carter: A Man of Principle – Still Active, Still Looking for Ways to Serve | Observer Editorial.” The Guardian. September 10, 2011.

<sup>258</sup> Brinkley, Douglas. "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The "Hands On" Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President." *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (1996): 505-29.

This work answers the question “At his historic site, how does the interpretation portray a distinctly partisan Jimmy Carter, accurately presenting the man as a whole, in a hyper-partisan political environment?” The Jimmy Carter National Historic Site takes a rather familiar and uncontroversial interpretation of the life of Carter. This is not to say that the interpretation is wrong. It is just not entirely correct. As noted previously, Carter’s life in government work has been recognizably political. The historic site aims to give a narrative of Carter that is appealing to all visitors. This narrative is seen at each of the structures within the site. At the same time, the site is not entirely effective in pitching the former president as apolitical. Culture historian Michael Kammen noted that “the heritage industry has advanced an impulse to remember what is attractive or flattering and to ignore all the rest.”<sup>259</sup> It is nice to think of a former president as a non-partisan figure, to see him as aspirational for the United States to look to for hope for the future. On the other hand, though, Carter is a politician. He is a complex character in American history. While he had many successes, he also had many missteps and failures. This has to be included in the interpretation to paint a fuller picture of the man himself. Currently, the historic site portrays Carter as a one-dimensional character. Specifically, the interpretation of Carter’s time on the Sumter County Board of Education forms an idealistic impression. The nostalgia used here falls apart in his public life. It is not accurate of what is occurring at that moment. This “great man” interpretation omits his racially insensitive actions while on the Board. While this in itself is not comprehensive, it also does not allow Carter to grow and evolve as a politician and

---

<sup>259</sup> Michael Kammen quoted in Benjamin Hofbauer, *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*. Page 1

person over his career. The addition of this aspect would provide a more realistic depiction of his life and beliefs.

Interpretation within the National Park Service categorically includes a certain level of flexibility in the interpretation/management plan to “improve content and accuracy” and to “identify multiple points of view and potentially sensitive issues.”<sup>260</sup> Therefore, the site has the authority to be able to change their interpretation plan and they should do so. Comprehensive conscious consultations with experienced and aware organizations can facilitate these larger conversations that are to be had at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. Race relations between Carter and the people of Plains/Archery as well as the nation as a whole play a significant part in the story of Carter’s life yet are rarely confronted in the interpretation at the site. There is an opportunity in the area around the Boyhood Home to truly give visitors a sense of everyday life in 1920s Georgia. Bringing in the story of Jack and Rachel Clark is an important step in contextualizing his life. Reaching outside of the federal government could prove to find a fresh perspective to the significance of Carter as well as the site as a whole.

It is likely impossible to manage a completely apolitical approach to the career of a politician and that is exactly the point. Carter needs to be characterized in a political manner to show that complete character. Interpretation of Carter’s life will change, and his legacy is still in motion. What is considered “right” changes with each coming generation and a final legacy may never come. The success of this site depends on their ability to abstract themselves from the situation, celebrating his accomplishments and remaining critical of his blunders.

---

<sup>260</sup> National Park Service, —Chapter 4: Interpretive Planning, under —Introduction, *Interpretation and Education Reference Manual* 6.

## **Bibliography**

- “1980 Electoral College Results.” National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed January 18, 2021.  
<https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/1980>.
- “About Habitat for Humanity.” Habitat for Humanity. Accessed March 2021.  
<https://www.habitat.org/about>.
- ADDRESS BY JIMMY CARTER ANNOUNCING HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE 1976  
DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB,  
December 1974, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library
- Alderson, William T., and Shirley Payne. Low. *Interpretation of Historic Sites*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1996.
- “The American Dream.” Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com, January 19, 2021.  
<https://www.dictionary.com/e/pop-culture/the-american-dream/>.
- Atlanta Constitution*, December 13, 1974
- Baker, Peter. “Was Jimmy Carter the Most Underrated President in History?” The New York Times. The New York Times, June 5, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/05/books/review/president-carter-stuart-eizenstat.html>.
- Barthold, Elizabeth, “Plains Train Depot” Written Historical Descriptive Data. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS No. GA – 2209; accessed December 18, 2020)  
<http://npshistory.com/publications/jica/clr-plains-depot.pdf>
- Beck, Larry, and Ted T. Cable. *Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore Pub., 2002.
- Beyle, Thad L., and J. Oliver Williams. *The American Governor in Behavioral Perspective*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Bodnar, John E. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994.
- Bourne, Peter G. *Jimmy Carter: a Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency*. New York: Scribner, 1997.
- “Boyhood Farm.” Jimmy Carter, March 31, 2016. <https://jimmycarter.info/2016/03/25/boyhood-farm/>.



- Brinkley, Douglas. "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The "Hands On" Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President." *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (1996): 505-29.
- Bruggeman, Seth C. *Born in the U.S.A: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.
- Cameron, Charles M. *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power*. 2000
- "Camp David Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process." U.S. Department of State: The Office of the Historian. U.S. Department of State. Accessed January 27, 2021. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/camp-david>.
- "Carter Endorses Gore, Calls Him 'Man of Character'." CNN. Cable News Network, November 2, 2000. <https://www.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/11/02/gore.carter/index.html>.
- "Carter Praises Obama." CNN. Cable News Network, January 30, 2008. <https://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2008/01/30/carter-praises-obama/>.
- Carter, Jimmy, William George Clark, and William Aldis Wright. *An Hour before Daylight Memories of a Rural Boyhood*. Sydney: National Information Library Service, Materials Production Group, 2004.
- Carter, Jimmy. *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016.
- Carter, Jimmy. *Turning Point: a Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*. Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1992.
- Carter, Jimmy. *Turning Point: a Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age*. Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1995.
- Carter, Jimmy. *Why Not the Best?: the First Fifty Years*. Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1996.
- Carter, Rosalynn. *First Lady from Plains*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994.
- "Carter: Kerry 'the President We Need Now'." CNN. Cable News Network, July 26, 2004. <https://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/07/26/cnna.carter/>.
- CBS News. "Former President Jimmy Carter: Trump 'Is Very Careless with the Truth.'" CBS News. CBS Interactive, August 28, 2018. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jimmy-carter-on-donald-trump-the-incumbent-president-is-very-careless-with-the-truth/>.
- Clymer, Adam. "John Anderson, Who Ran Against Reagan and Carter in 1980, Is Dead at 95." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 4, 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/04/us/politics/john-anderson-who-ran-against-reagan-and-carter-in-1980-is-dead-at-95.html>.

Coleman, Laurence Vail. *Historic House Museums*. By Laurence Vail Coleman. Washington: American Association of Museums, 1933.

“Comprehensive Interpretative Planning” United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Accessed December 2020.  
<http://npshistory.com/publications/interpretation/interp-visitor-services-guideline.pdf>

Cullinane, Michael Patrick, and Sylvia Ellis. *Constructing Presidential Legacy: How We Remember the American President*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

Curti, Merle. *The Roots of American Loyalty*. New York: Atheneum, 1968.

Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. “Review Essay: Jim Crow Segregation Remembered, Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory & Identity in Black America Since 1940, Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.” *The Public Historian*, Vol 36., No. 2. University of California Press on behalf of the National Council on Public History, May 2014.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/tph.2014.36.2.99.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6a785ee5344b22abe9fd2f7604e0ddee>.

Delaney, Paul. “A Peanut Farmer Wins Race in Georgia.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, November 4, 1970. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/04/archives/a-peanut-farmer-wins-race-in-georgia.html>.

“Defining Interpretation” National Association for Interpretation. Accessed December 22, 2020.  
<https://www.interpnet.com/nai/docs/JIR-v7n1.pdf>

Department of Education Organization Act, P.L. 96-98, 93 STAT. 695 (1979)

“Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for The Carter Home and Garden.” Jimmy Carter National Historic Site. National Park Service; US Dept of Interior, September 2019.  
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=388&projectID=79805&documentID=98651>.

Donnelly, Jessica Foy. *Interpreting Historic House Museums*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Duster, Chandelis. “Jimmy Carter Says Reelection of Trump Would Be a 'Disaster'.” CNN. Cable News Network, September 19, 2019.  
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/19/politics/jimmy-carter-donald-trump-reelection-disaster/index.html>.

- Elk, Kathleen. "When Former President Jimmy Carter Left Office, His Peanut Business Was \$1 Million in Debt." CNBC. CNBC, July 18, 2019. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/17/when-jimmy-carter-left-office-his-peanut-business-was-deep-in-debt.html>.
- Emerson, Bo. "When Jimmy Carter Lusted in His Heart." The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, September 28, 2017. <https://www.ajc.com/news/when-jimmy-carter-lusted-his-heart/kzdD5pLXvT3qnf5RyJlIk/>.
- Evans, Sean. "Why Rural Voters Vote Republican." The Jackson Sun. Jackson Sun, March 15, 2019. <https://www.jacksonsun.com/story/opinion/2019/03/15/why-rural-voters-vote-republican/3179313002/>.
- Feldman, Glenn. *Painting Dixie Red: When, Where, Why, and How the South Became Republican*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014.
- "Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's Remarks at the Funeral Service for President Gerald R. Ford." The Carter Center. Accessed December 26, 2020. [https://www.cartercenter.org/news/editorials\\_speeches/ford\\_eulogy.html](https://www.cartercenter.org/news/editorials_speeches/ford_eulogy.html).
- "Foundations of Interpretation" United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Accessed December 22, 2020. <https://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/foundationcurriculum.pdf>
- Gaillard, Frye, and David C. Carter. *Prophet from Plains: Jimmy Carter and His Legacy*. University of Georgia Press, 2007.
- Gass, Nick, and Paul Demko. "Poll: Jimmy Carter Did the Best Post-White House Work." POLITICO, November 5, 2015. <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/11/poll-presidents-carter-reagan-215537>.
- "Georgia Election Results." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 3, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-georgia.html>.
- Goldsborough, Bob. "Obamas Buy Martha's Vineyard Mansion for \$11.75 Million." [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com). Chicago Tribune, December 5, 2019. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/real-estate/elite-street/ct-re-1205-elite-street-obamas-20191205-tpd3s54jenffrjyc7ucr3ef53a-story.html>.
- Greenberg, David. "The Feats and Failures of Jimmy Carter." The New York Times. The New York Times, October 1, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/books/review/his-very-best-jonathan-alter.html>.
- "Guinea Worm Case Totals." The Carter Center, December 2020. [https://www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea\\_worm/case-totals.html](https://www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea_worm/case-totals.html).

- Ham, Sam H. *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2013.
- Hauser, Christine. "The Inaugural Parade, and the Presidents Who Walked It." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, January 20, 2017.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/us/trump-inaugural-parade-walk.html>.
- Hawkins, Derek. "'Y'all See Why I Voted for Him?': Jimmy Carter Says He Was a Bernie Sanders Supporter." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, April 29, 2019.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/05/09/yall-see-why-i-voted-for-him-jimmy-carter-says-he-was-a-bernie-sanders-supporter/>.
- Hepper, Erica & Ritchie, Timothy & Sedikides, Constantine & Wildschut, Tim. *Odyssey's End: Lay Conceptions of Nostalgia Reflect Its Original Homeric Meaning*. *Emotion* (Washington, D.C.). 2011, 12. 102-19. 10.1037/a0025167.
- Historic Sites Act (1935), 54 USC 309101
- Holland, Oscar. "Hillary Clinton Offers Rare Glimpse inside Family's DC Home," May 30, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/hillary-clinton-washington-home-photos/index.html>.
- Holloway, Jonathan Scott. *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940*. University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- "How Groups Voted in 1976." *How Groups Voted in 1976* | Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Accessed February 11, 2021. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/how-groups-voted-1976>.
- Hofbauer, Benjamin. *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
- Igielnik, Ruth. "Most Americans Say They Regularly Wore a Mask in Stores in the Past Month; Fewer See Others Doing It." *Pew Research Center*, July 27, 2020.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/23/most-americans-say-they-regularly-wore-a-mask-in-stores-in-the-past-month-fewer-see-others-doing-it/>
- "Inaugural Buttons." *George Washington's Mount Vernon*. Accessed December 28, 2020.  
<https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/collections-holdings/the-material-culture-of-the-presidency/inaugural-buttons/>.
- "The Inauguration of Jimmy Carter." *The White House Historical Association*. Accessed January 26, 2021. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-inauguration-of-jimmy-carter>.

- Inscoc, John. "Sumter County." New Georgia Encyclopedia. Accessed January 2021.  
<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/sumter-county>.
- "James Carter." The White House. The United States Government, January 15, 2021.  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/james-carter/>.
- "Jimmy Carter Improves with Age." ABC News, October 1, 1999.  
<https://abcnews.go.com/images/pdf/796a10Carter.pdf>.
- "Jimmy Carter Inaugural Address for Governor of Georgia." Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, January 12, 1971.  
[https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/inaugural\\_address\\_gov.pdf](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/inaugural_address_gov.pdf).
- "Jimmy Carter National Historic Site (U.S. National Park Service)." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed January 11, 2021.  
<https://www.nps.gov/jica/index.htm>.
- Jimmy Carter National Historical Park Redesignation Act, Pub. L. No: 116-341 (2021)
- Jimmy Carter: Rock and Roll President*. Directed by Mary Wharton. CNN, 2021
- "Jimmy Carter Wins Nobel Peace Prize." History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 24, 2009. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/jimmy-carter-wins-nobel-prize>.
- "Jimmy Carter-- The Nobel Peace Prize 2002." NobelPrize.org, 2002.  
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2002/press-release/>.
- "Jimmy Carter: A Man of Principle – Still Active, Still Looking for Ways to Serve | Observer Editorial." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, September 10, 2011.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/11/jimmy-carter-human-rights>.
- "John F. Kennedy: On History." AMERICAN HERITAGE, February 1, 2021.  
<https://www.americanheritage.com/history>
- Judd, Alan. "Carter celebrates 75th birthday: There's no place like home, he says." *The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution*, October 2, 1999
- "Julia Coleman." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 2020. <https://www.nps.gov/jica/learn/historyculture/people.htm>.
- Kanter, Jodi. *Presidential Libraries As Performance: Curating American Character From Herbert Hoover to George W. Bush*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2016.
- "Key Moments in the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis at US Embassy." AP NEWS. Associated Press, November 4, 2019. <https://apnews.com/article/6149da2418b140c2b1d5b0ca5779bac5>.

- Khalid, Asma. "Republicans' White Working-Class Trap: A Growing Reliance." NPR January 18, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/2016/01/18/462027861/republicans-white-working-class-trap-a-growing-reliance>
- King, Elizabeth. "Presidential Campaign Buttons and Pins: The Inside Story." Time. Time, May 17, 2016. <https://time.com/4336931/campaign-buttons-history/>.
- Klein, Betsy. "At 95, Jimmy Carter Is Still Living His Faith through Service." CNN. Cable News Network, October 12, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/12/politics/jimmy-carter-habitat-for-humanity-nashville/index.html>.
- Kotkin, Joel. "The Republican Party's Fatal Attraction To Rural America." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, May 1, 2012. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2012/03/14/the-gops-fatal-attraction-to-rural-america/?sh=16e904964af7>.
- Lechner, Zachary, "Commemorating Jimmy Carter and Southern Rural Life in Plains, Georgia." *Born in the U.S.A.: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*, edited by Seth Bruggeman, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012
- Lewis, William J. *Interpreting for Park Visitors*. Fort Washington, PA.: Eastern National, 2011.
- Library, Jimmy Carter. "Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter." Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed December 20, 2020. <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/speeches/inaugadd.phtml>.
- "Management Policies 2006" United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Accessed December 2020. [https://www.nps.gov/policy/MP\\_2006.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/policy/MP_2006.pdf)
- Martin, Emmie. "The Obamas Just Bought an \$8.1 Million Mansion in Washington, D.C. - Take a Look Inside." CNBC. CNBC, June 2, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/02/photos-of-the-obamas-8-point-1-million-washington-d-c-house.html>.
- Mattson, Kevin. "Examining Carter's 'Malaise Speech,' 30 Years Later." NPR. NPR, July 12, 2009. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106508243>.
- Merony, John. "How to Elect a President: Jimmy Carter, Two South Georgia Political Novices, and the Unpredictable Road to the White House." Atlanta Magazine, March 9, 2020. <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/how-to-elect-a-president-jimmy-carter-two-south-georgia-political-novices-and-the-unpredictable-road-to-the-white-house/>.
- McClosky, Herbert. "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 58, no. 2 (1964): 361-82.
- McCollough, David. *Character Above All*, PBS Broadcast Transcript, May 29, 1996

McKee, Seth C. "Rural Voters and the Polarization of American Presidential Elections." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 1 (2008): 101-08. Accessed March 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452117>.

Michael, Deanna L.. *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency*. United States: State University of New York Press, 2008.

Miller, Zachary D.; Rice, William L.; Taff, B. D.; Newman, Peter. 2018. "Understanding Visitor Motivations at Jimmy Carter National Historic Site: A Principal Components Approach." *Heritage* 1, no. 2: 328-334.

Moe, Terry. "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory." In *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*. 1993

Morgan, Iwan. "Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and the New Democratic Economics." *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 4 (2004): 1015-039. Accessed March 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091666>.

Morris, Kenneth Earl. *Jimmy Carter, American Moral*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Morrow, Lance. "Nation: Is There Life After Disaster?" *Time*. Time Inc., November 17, 1980. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,950488,00.html>.

"Mount Vernon Ladies' Association." George Washington's Mount Vernon. Accessed December 2020. <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/mount-vernon-ladies-association>

"My Son, the President: an Interview with Lillian Carter" *U.S. News and World Report*, March 7, 1977

Nagourney, Adam. "With Some Help, Clintons Purchase a White House." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, September 3, 1999. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/03/nyregion/with-some-help-clintons-purchase-a-white-house.html>.

"National Historic Landmark Program." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed March 2021. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1582/index.htm>.

National Park Service, —Interpretation and Education. <http://www.nps.gov/learn/> (accessed March 2021).

National Park Service, "Foundation Document: Jimmy Carter National Historic Site" NPS 330/116616, March 2013,

National Park Service Organic Act (1916), 16 U.S.C. §1.

Nelson, Michael. "Evaluating the Presidency." In *The Presidency and the Political System*, 1–23. 2000. [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/gov\\_fac\\_pubs/288](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/gov_fac_pubs/288)

Newport, Frank. "Americans Big on Idea of Living in the Country." Gallup.com. Gallup, November 23, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/245249/americans-big-idea-living-country.aspx>.

New York Times, 11 December 1938 issue

"Notable Graduates-- James Earl Carter, Jr." The U.S. Naval Academy. Accessed January 24, 2021. <https://www.usna.edu/Notables/featured/01carter.php>.

O'Brien, William Patrick. *Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District, Georgia*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991.

"On History." AMERICAN HERITAGE, <https://www.americanheritage.com/history>.

"Our Mission." The Carter Center. Accessed January 9, 2021. <https://www.cartercenter.org/about/index.html>.

Pearson, Richard. "BILLY CARTER, EX-PRESIDENT'S BROTHER, DIES OF CANCER." The Washington Post. WP Company, September 26, 1988. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1988/09/26/billy-carter-ex-presidents-brother-dies-of-cancer/d807be17-aed7-44ca-af51-e9f11b4639d7/>.

Perlstein, Rick. "An Interview With 'Playboy' Magazine Nearly Torpedoed Jimmy Carter's Presidential Campaign." Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution, August 17, 2020. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/interview-playboy-magazine-nearly-torpedoed-jimmy-carters-presidential-campaign-180975576/>.

"Plain Talk: A Newsletter from the National Park Service," February 1991.

"The Plains Depot." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 26, 2020. <https://www.nps.gov/jica/planyourvisit/plains-depot.htm>.

"Playboy in Popular Culture" *The New York Times*, September 28, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/28/business/media/playboy-hugh-hefner.html>

"President Jimmy Carter Concession Speech." C-SPAN. Accessed January 19, 2021. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?418299-1%2Fpresident-jimmy-carter-concession-speech>.

"Presidential Approval Ratings -- Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends." Gallup.com. Gallup, November 26, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.



Presidential Records Act (1978) 44 U.S.C. §§ 2201–2207

“Proclamation 4483.” National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration, January 1977. <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/proclamations/04483.html>.

“Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868-1971” Atlanta, Georgia; Georgia State Historic Preservation Office; National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service) <https://www.dca.ga.gov/sites/default/files/historicschools.pdf>

Quinn, Matthew C. “Carter Criticizes Reagan's Gulf Policy.” UPI. UPI, October 17, 1987. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1987/10/17/Carter-criticizes-Reagans-gulf-policy/1657561441600/>.

Reinberger, Mark. “The Architecture of Sharecropping: Extended Farms of the Georgia Piedmont.” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 116-34. Accessed March 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3514429>.

“Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony for the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, Georgia.” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, October 1, 1986. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-dedication-ceremony-carter-presidential-center-atlanta-georgia>.

“Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963.” *Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963* | JFK Library, [www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/report-to-the-american-people-on-civil-rights-11-june-1963](http://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/report-to-the-american-people-on-civil-rights-11-june-1963).

Romero, Vidal. “Of Love and Hate: Understanding the Determinants of Presidential Legacies.” *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2014): 123–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912913492911>.

Ryan, David. “RE-ENACTING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH NOSTALGIA – THE 1976 US BICENTENNIAL AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR.” FIAR: Forum for Inter-American Research Vol. 5, Issue 3 page 26-48, April 5, 2012. <http://interamericaonline.org/volume-5-3/ryan/>.

Sanders, Randy. ““The Sad Duty of Politics”: Jimmy Carter and the Issue of Race in His 1970 Gubernatorial Campaign.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (1992): 612-38

Schaub, Michael. “His Very Best' Calls Jimmy Carter 'Perhaps The Most Misunderstood President'.” NPR. NPR, September 29, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/29/918289286/his-very-best-calls-jimmy-carter-perhaps-the-most-misunderstood-president>.

- “Total Scores/Overall Rankings: C-SPAN Survey on Presidents 2017.” *Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network*
- “The Search for a Usable Past.” Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, October 2001. [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles\\_papers\\_reports/716](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/716).
- Seitz-Wald, Alex. “Jimmy Carter Reveals He Voted for Bernie Sanders Over Hillary Clinton.” NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, May 9, 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/democrats-vs-trump/jimmy-carter-reveals-he-voted-bernie-sanders-over-hillary-clinton-n756846>.
- “Statement from Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.” The Carter Center. Accessed January 25, 2021. <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/carter-center-statement-120615.html>.
- Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Campaigns and Elections.” University of Virginia's Miller Center, July 17, 2017. <https://millercenter.org/president/carter/campaigns-and-elections>.
- Strong, Robert A. “Jimmy Carter: Life Before the Presidency.” University of Virginia's Miller Center, December 18, 2020. <https://millercenter.org/president/carter/life-before-the-presidency>.
- Sullivan, Kevin, and Mary Jordan. “The Un-Celebrity President: Jimmy Carter Shuns Riches, Lives Modestly in His Georgia Hometown.” The Washington Post. WP Company, August 17, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/08/17/feature/the-un-celebrity-president-jimmy-carter-shuns-riches-lives-modestly-in-his-georgia-hometown/?utm\\_term=.8ec44121a47a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/08/17/feature/the-un-celebrity-president-jimmy-carter-shuns-riches-lives-modestly-in-his-georgia-hometown/?utm_term=.8ec44121a47a).
- Sumter County Board of Education Minutes, September 24, 1956, Sumter County Schools, Americus, Georgia.
- The New York Times. “Playboy in Popular Culture,” September 28, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/28/business/media/playboy-hugh-hefner.html>.
- Theobald, William F. *Global Tourism: the next Decade*. Guildford: Butterworth Hein, 1994.
- To Establish the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District in the State. Of Georgia, and for other purposes. Public Law 100-206, 101 Stat. 1436 (1987)
- Tierney, John. “What Is Nostalgia Good For? Quite a Bit, Research Shows.” The New York Times. The New York Times, July 8, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research-shows.html>.
- Tilden, Freeman. *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.

*Time* magazine, May 31, 1971

“Trust in Government: 1958-2015.” Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/11/23/1-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>.

“U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Sumter County, Georgia.” Census Bureau QuickFacts. Accessed December 14, 2020. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/sumtercountygeorgia>.

Wilson, Dustin Lee. “BABY BOOMER VISITORS IN U.S. NATIONAL PARKS: EXPLORING AGE CHANGES, ACTIVITY SELECTION AND TRANSPORTATION MODE CHOICE.” Clemson University, July 2015. <https://snrs.ucmerced.edu/sites/snrs.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/dlwdissertation7212015.pdf>.

Weyeneth, Robert R. *The Architecture of Racial Segregation: the Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past*. Santa Barbara, CA: Graduate Program in Public Historical Studies, Dept. of History, University of California, 2005.

Yardley, William. “Howard H. Callaway, Strategist Who Helped G.O.P. Rise in South, Dies at 86.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, March 22, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/us/howard-h-callaway-strategist-who-helped-gop-rise-in-south-dies-at-86.html>.