

Carter, Jimmy. *An Hour Before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001.

**AUTHOR:** On October 1, 1924, Jimmy Carter was born into a successful farming family in Plains, Georgia. As part of an esteemed family, he was able to get an appointment to attend the Annapolis Naval Academy. After graduation in 1946, he returned to Plains, where he married his next door neighbor, Rosalynn Smith. Carter served as a state senator from 1962 until he was elected governor of Georgia in 1970. Then, in 1976, he was elected President of the United States. His administration had some successes, like bringing Israel and Egypt together, in what is referred to as the Camp David Accords. However, he was helpless in resolving the 444-day Iran Hostage Crisis. His administration is known for its passionate stance on human rights. After serving in the White House, he wrote numerous books, including, but not limited to *Living Faith* and *Sources of Strength*. His post-presidency advocacy of peace and human rights around the world resulted in his winning of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

**TOPIC AND SCOPE:** Carter's book is a memoir of his life, concentrating heavily on his childhood. In the book, he discusses the people and the events which helped to shape his thinking. Taking place before, during, and after the Great Depression, he explores the effects of economics on the South. He also discusses the unquestioned existence of segregation in the South.

**THESIS:**

The majority of the book concentrates on his early years growing-up, his learning on how to farm, and his relationship with his father. He maintains that as a child growing up, he was always an obedient, hard worker who strove to learn as much as he could about farming. Carter desperately sought the affection of his father and he remains somewhat disappointed at the unemotional relationship that his dad had towards him. During his time off, he wandered around his family's farm, including the surrounding woods and swamps with his predominantly black friends. He contends that much of what he learned about farming and about life came from Jack Clark, who was a black foreman on his family's farm, along with his wife, Rachel. Carter also speaks fondly about his friend, A.D., a black child of one of the tenants on his family's farm. As a boy, he perceived A.D. as an equal, despite the unwavering beliefs in segregation that existed in the South. This was due to his parents' fair treatment of blacks. His world was turned upside down at the age of fourteen, however, when his friend, A.D. and his other black friends began to treat Carter as the leader of his group of friends. Interestingly enough, he embraced this authority role because it made him feel more grown-up, like his father. Still, by spending countless hours with blacks on his family's farm, he grew up sympathizing with them. Consequently, he developed liberal racial beliefs contrary to the mainstream in the South. Additionally, he claims that his love of nature was also formed in his early years from walking around outside without shoes.

As for economics, Carter explains how most small farmers did not have the option to diversify away from cotton or to acquire new technology. He explains, "Most landowners had little if any money for improvements or adequate fertilizer and many were just looking for a way out. It was a shame how run-down some of the farms became, but when Daddy bought such a farm, he would transform it."<sup>1</sup> This explains how the wealthier farmers, like his father Earl, were getting richer, while the poor were getting poorer. He also discusses how the New Deal helped to increase farm income, but was criticized by some, including his father, for interfering with states' rights. He claims that his father "was never able to forget the forced plowing up of cotton and slaying of hogs during the earlier years of the New Deal."<sup>2</sup>

**CRITIQUE:** Carter's book was very well written. His lucid and smooth-flowing narrative made reading it a real treat. He details wonderfully the life of a farmer and allows the reader to truly comprehend the complexities of the profession. By using some memorable anecdotes, he is able to bring the reader into the reality of his world. This book allows the reader to gain a new-found understanding of the roots of Carter's human rights policies as president and how his obedient nature to his father resulted in his inability to tell a lie. However, the book is not without its faults. One criticism is that Carter does not mention very much about his wife, Rosalynn, who was his next door neighbor. Perhaps, this is understandable, though, because she was only a baby when he was growing up, and so, he was not concerned with her at the time. Another criticism of the book is that it did not have an introduction. This would have benefited readers who may not have been supporters of Carter, but simply wanted to get a summary of his beliefs. Carter's critics would not read a whole book about him, and thus, would continue with a flawed understanding of his character and the basis for his actions. From a scholar's standpoint, some of the statistics that he uses from government reports and magazines could have benefited from footnotes. Overall, though, his discussion of how his values were formed will help to improve his legacy.

**SOURCES:**

Carter wrote this book so that people could understand him better. By learning how his values were shaped, readers are better able to comprehend his actions as president. He was also driven to write this story because he wanted to speak about a simpler time, not long ago, to show how things have changed in Georgia. He maintains that while farming was his passion, his own children cannot fully comprehend the seemingly distant world that their father grew up in.

His wife, Rosalynn, helped him to clarify and to remember his life in Plains, Georgia. Additionally, visits to his childhood home helped to spark memories for him. He also uses magazines and government reports, including U.S. Department of Agriculture studies in order to add statistical information to his work.

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 199.

<sup>2</sup> Jimmy Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight*, 70.