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Carter, Jimmy

Oct. 4, 1924-

American president

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Names: Carter, James Earl

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Carter, Jimmy
Carter, James Earl ('Jimmy' Carter)
Biography from *Nobel Prize Winners 2002-2006 Supplement* (2003)
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(c)[2003]. Originally published by Oxford University Press.

The former U.S. president Jimmy Carter was born James Earl Carter Jr. on October 1, 1924 in Plains, Georgia, a town with a population of about 550. He is the son of James Earl Carter Sr. (known as Earl), and the former Lillian Gordy (often referred to as Miss Lillian). According to researchers for Debrett's Peerage, Carter may be descended from British nobility through his paternal ancestor Thomas Gordy (often referred to as Miss Lillian). According to researchers for Debrett's Peerage, Carter may be descended from British nobility through his paternal ancestor Thomas Gordy, who sailed from England, in 1637, to become a moderately prosperous plantation owner in Virginia. The ancestry on the Gordy side was Scotch and Irish.

Earl Carter was a peanut farmer and storekeeper, a pillar of the Plains Baptist Church, and a conservative civic leader who became a state legislator shortly before his death in 1953. Although Earl was a proponent of racial segregation, Lillian, a nurse, was more liberal in her political outlook, particularly in the area of civil rights. She worked on Lyndon Johnson's 1964 campaign and joined the Peace Corps at the age of 67 to serve as a nurse in India. From his mother Jimmy Carter acquired his habit of reading at any opportunity, including mealtimes, and his love of books was reinforced by a high-school teacher, Julia Coleman, whom he quoted in his presidential inaugural address.

Carter was the oldest of four children: two sisters, Gloria and Ruth, and a brother, William Alton Carter III. As an adult Carter was greatly influenced by his sister Ruth Carter Stapleton, who as a lay Baptist minister lectured and conducted workshops in faith healing across the country. In her book *The Gift of Inner Healing* (1976), Ruth later recalled: "With the boys, [Earl] was a strict disciplinarian. He believed the boys should be raised to work for a living. From the time he was six, when the bell rang on the farm, Jimmy went to work with everyone else."

In high school Carter excelled academically and was also a member of the basketball and debating teams. He was a particularly poor debater, however, because he found it difficult to project in public. "He wasn't shy," Carter's sister Gloria told Kandy Stroud, author of *How Jimmy Won* (1977). "He was little. He was only five feet three when he went away to college. . . . He was never really aggressive either until recently. He was never a leader except in the family because he was the oldest." Carter himself told Stroud: "Yes, I was shy, but a better word would be isolated. . . . My life was centered on the farm."

Carter graduated from high school in 1941, when he was just 16. He then studied for a year at Georgia Southwestern College, in Americus, and for another year at the Georgia Institute of Technology, in Atlanta, taking prerequisite mathematics courses for admission to the **United States** Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland—a longtime goal inspired by his uncle Tom Gordy, a career navy man. Carter entered the academy in 1943, scored good grades there almost effortlessly, and graduated in the top tenth

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