

DISCUSSION GUIDE

An Hour Before Daylight

by Jimmy Carter

BOOK GROUP

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Reprinted from publisher.

Jimmy Carter was the thirty-ninth President of the United States, serving from 1977 to 1981. In 1982, he and his wife founded The Carter Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of people around the world. Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, and was the author of thirty books, including *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*; *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power*; *An Hour Before Daylight: Memoirs of a Rural Boyhood*; and *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis*. He died in 2024 at the age of 100.

BOOK SUMMARY

Carter writes about the powerful rhythms of countryside and community in a sharecropping economy, offering an unforgettable portrait of his father, a brilliant farmer and a strict segregationist who treated black workers with respect and fairness; his strong-willed and well-read mother; and the five other people who shaped his early life, three of whom were black.

Carter's clean and eloquent prose evokes a time when the cycles of life were predictable and simple and the rules were heartbreaking and complex. In his singular voice and with a novelist's gift for detail, Jimmy Carter creates a sensitive portrait of an era that shaped the nation and recounts a classic, American story of enduring importance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jimmy Carter reflects on his father's complex personality and the dual influence of fairness and racism. Considering Earl Carter's treatment of his Black neighbors, how might his actions be justified by the societal norms of his time, and to what extent should he be held accountable from a modern perspective?
2. The memoir highlights the stark realities of racial segregation and Carter's friendships with Black neighbors. How does Carter's depiction of his youthful friendship with A.D. reflect the tension between personal relationships and societal racism? Should Carter bear responsibility for not challenging the discrimination at that time?
3. Reflecting on Carter's early exposure to both sides of his family's influence, who do you think had a more significant impact on his later commitment to human rights: his father with his shrewd but complex ethics, or his mother with her compassion and morality? Support your view with examples from the book.
4. Carter describes the gap between the intentions of federal government policies and their actual impact on rural Southern communities. How do you interpret the Southern resistance to New Deal policies like the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and do you think this resistance was justified?
5. How does Carter's reflection on the slow changes toward racial integration in Georgia, juxtaposed with the federal government's tardy policy actions, provide insight into the challenges of reconciling local traditions with national ideals of equality and justice?

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