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Book Review - Jimmy Carter: Elected President with Pocket Change and Peanuts

Kristine Stilwell
kristine.stilwell@ung.edu

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Off the SHELF

Jimmy Carter: Elected President with Pocket Change and Peanuts by Padgett, Dorothy; foreword by Jimmy Carter (Mercer University Press, 2016: ISBN 978-0-88146-586-0, \$35.00)

Dorothy “Dot” Padgett’s *Jimmy Carter: Elected President with Pocket Change and Peanuts* is a biography of President James Earl Carter, but the heart and soul of the book centers on the work of the volunteers and staff that helped get him elected. Padgett, called “Carter’s den mother” by the *Washington Post*, was a skillful organizer, campaign insider, and ardent supporter of Jimmy Carter. She coordinated a group of volunteers from Georgia, affectionately called the “Peanut Brigade.” These Georgians went to New Hampshire (and other states) on their own dimes. They trudged through the snow, knocked on doors, and tried to sway registered voters. Carter’s Democratic primary victory in New Hampshire provided momentum for the campaign, garnered media attention, and signaled that Carter was a candidate of substance. Following Carter’s election, Padgett served as assistant chief of protocol in the State Department.

Persons interested in the process of political campaigning will benefit from reading Padgett’s book, but readers unfamiliar with events that occurred in the 1970s might find Padgett’s book challenging. Others may find it incomplete. For example, Padgett writes that Carter failed to

secure the support of organized labor and only much later does she mention that Carter supported right to work laws (or at least was indifferent to them). Throughout the book Vice President Walter Mondale is always called by his nickname, Fritz, even in the index. Although Padgett writes about Carter’s energy program, very little is said about the oil embargo and the devastating impact of the energy crisis on the American economy. The book also has serious omissions including Carter’s firing of four cabinet members and his penchant for excessive micromanaging that impaired his ability to govern effectively.

Padgett’s book is uncritical, or, in the words of Jimmy Carter, a “friendly” account. Nevertheless, she is right to highlight Carter’s charismatic personality, honesty, and strength of character. But those seeking extensive details about Carter’s achievements as governor, statesman, and humanitarian will need to look elsewhere. So will readers that want a more nuanced analysis of the election.

Selectors for academic libraries as well as state and local history collections may find this book of interest—as will the hundreds of Georgia volunteers that worked tirelessly to get Jimmy Carter elected.

Kristine Stilwell is Reference Services Librarian at University of North Georgia

