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Georgia and the Election of Jimmy Carter

By

PHINIZY SPALDING

IN November 1976 the American people, by voting in Jimmy Carter of Georgia as their new president, shattered the long held belief that no one from the South—least of all from Georgia—could be elected to the highest office in the United States. Whether it be the triumph of New South principles, a victory over the party of Watergate, or a form of psychological reparation done by the other sections of the nation to the South as a kind of late payment for injuries done in the past, one thing is certain from the vantage point of Georgia: the state took, has taken, and is still taking enormous pride in the victory of the man from Plains. Articles about Georgia, Georgians, Georgia politics, Georgia social mores, Georgia customs, Georgia speech, Georgia cooking, the Georgia man, the Georgia mind, and a dozen other state-related topics seem to be read with some avidity not only by the Eastern Establishment (many of whom are from the South to begin with) but also by the rest of a mobile nation in search of what makes Georgia tick. Whither, in short, Georgia's roots?

While many Georgians can look upon all of this with a degree of bemused objectivity, even the most jaded will admit, when pressed, that it's nice to have a home grown boy in the White House. Georgia's pride manifested itself in ground swell proportions a bit over a year ago when Carter—aided by a phalanx of Georgia volunteers who invaded New Hampshire—won that primary and became a “major” candidate for the Democratic nomination. Pride swelled to fever pitch in the Florida and Georgia primaries, and manifested itself once again at the November general election. Few political events since secession

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itself have so excited Georgians.

One of the heartening things about the Carter phenomenon is that black Georgians were as excited by it as the whites, for Carter had come to symbolize a new awakening and a new chance for the black man too. An Atlanta *Constitution* editorial, written in the warm glow of 3 November, may have put its finger on the significance of the black support Carter received nationally as well as locally. "Jimmy Carter is the President-elect of the United States now, the first Georgian in the history of the nation to win that title. He is a man of the New South and a man of the nation, a white Southerner whose earliest most sturdy support came from black Americans in critical primary states."¹ His backing was indeed national in scope, but some of Carter's most effective supporters in Georgia—particularly in the early going—came from such able black politicians as Andrew Young, Maynard Jackson, and Ben Brown. When the votes were cast on election day the Atlanta black precincts proved the depth of their loyalty by rolling up almost unbelievable majorities for their fellow Georgian. Morehouse Gym precinct showed 832 votes for Carter, 16 for Ford; Morris Brown reported 620 for Carter, 16 for Ford; Pryor Street School 133 for Carter, Ford 3. Precinct 3B (Free For All) came in with 557 Carter votes to one single lonely Ford ballot. At the same time, Young ran at almost exactly the same percentage as Carter in these four precincts.²

In the rest of Georgia, it would appear that almost every segment of society voted for the state's ex-governor. Only with the country club set did Carter fare poorly, but this came as no particular surprise to him or to his strategists. Democratic candidates on the national ticket have not done well with the country clubbers since FDR's first term. Every one of the nineteen precincts in and around Sandy Springs, for example, went to President Ford, some by a 2-1 ratio or better.³ The same is true for similar upper urban and suburban economic precincts elsewhere in the state. The less affluent whites in Atlanta and

other Georgia cities, though, apparently supported Carter, who also showed considerable strength with blue-collar and farming elements. The white academic sector backed the Georgian—the Emory precinct by almost 2-1—and all Athens city precincts supported him. Carter's vote was especially strong in the Cedar Creek subdivision, where there is a significant grouping of the University of Georgia's academic middle class.⁴

On the belief that most people missed seeing the complete Georgia returns from last fall's presidential election, the *Quarterly* offers the figures from all of the state's 159 counties. The certified returns printed below are stored in Secretary of State Ben Fortson's office, and the editor would like to thank Mr. Fortson and his staff for the cheerful cooperation offered.

Several features of the Carter vote in Georgia might be pointed out. Even the "traditional Republican counties" in the mountains along the North Carolina and Tennessee borders went strongly for Carter. Union, Fannin, and Towns cast 7,983 votes for Governor Carter and 4,975 for Gerald Ford—roughly 60% of the vote for Carter. (Admittedly considerably below the average for the rest of the state, but strong North Georgia support nonetheless.) In the congressional race in the same counties, Democrat Ed Jenkins pulled almost as many votes as Carter, but his Republican opponent drew just over half as many as Ford.⁵ Also in North Georgia, Gilmer county went almost 2-1 for Carter, White went over 3-1, and Rabun and Murray counties about 4-1. In the last four counties Carter's share of the vote rose to an impressive 75%, thereby increasing his full share of the mountain vote in the seven counties to 68%. These counties are relatively sparsely populated and have an overwhelming preponderance of whites in their makeup. Carter, then, ran about as strongly as any Democrat has in these selected mountain counties in recent years, pulling a total of 18,516 to Ford's 8,341.

The returns from an eight county area of Northwest Georgia show results that are somewhat different, but not dramatically so. Walker and Catoosa, fast becoming bedroom counties for Chattanooga, evinced the strongest support for Ford, who also demon-

strated some strength in Floyd (Rome) and Whitfield (Dalton). Even so, these four counties gave Carter 65% of their vote. On the other hand, the more rural, lightly populated, almost wholly white counties of Dade, Chattooga, Gordon, and Murray, presented Carter with 76% of their vote.

The ten counties chosen for Northeast Georgia show an interesting pattern.⁶ Elbert county, with a roughly 32% non-white population, voted almost 5-1 for Carter; Jackson, with less than 13% non-white, supported the Georgia candidate by a 4-1 margin. Greene county, with over 50% of its population non-white, also opted for a virtually 4-1 ratio. Madison, Barrow, and Walton went 3-1 or better for Carter. Only Clarke and Oconee, where many who work in Athens live, failed to support Carter by less than 2-1. Clarke, Athens, and the University are well known for political lemming instincts that go back to the days of Abit Nix and Blanton Fortson. Athens and the University were later hotbeds of support for Carl Sanders (defeated by Carter in the 1970 gubernatorial primary). After Sanders' loss, Clarke carried its political death wish to new heights by being the only county in the state to vote for Republican Hal Suit in his general election race against Carter for the governorship. Excluding Clarke and Oconee, Carter received a whopping 77% from Northeast Georgia. The Georgia peanut farmer, in fact, did very well indeed in the seven counties in the state where the fewest number of total votes were cast. His majority was 73%, and in tiny Echols (Statenville) he received a landslide 84%.

The saying that a prophet is last recognized in his own land is not quite borne out by the figure for Sumter county (72%), but it is a fact that the eight counties touching Sumter gave the Georgian a higher per cent (73%) of their vote than did Carter's home county. Marion (Buena Vista) opted for Carter at roughly 5-1; Dooley and Macon at better than 4-1. The latter two counties have more non-whites in their population but Carter's support was drawn from all elements. Other rural counties with similar racial makeups showed roughly similar reactions. Hancock

county, with almost 74% of its population non-white, backed Carter better than 3-1; Taliaferro county about the same. The polarization that existed in many Atlanta precincts was not so easy to detect in the rural counties where the white farmer apparently found Carter, the home town boy and man of the soil, easier to equate with than Ford and his midwesternisms, his religion, and his golf matches or skiing jaunts to Vail. On the other hand Sandy Springers, many of them with as many Georgia "ties" as Philadelphia scrapple, understood President Ford but not the toothy, born-again smile of the farmer from Plains.

The six coastal counties of Georgia voted for Carter by "only" a 61-39% count. When Glynn (Brunswick) and Chatham (Savannah) are withheld, Carter's per cent shoots up to roughly 75%. Urban-oriented Chatham and Glynn accorded the Georgian only 58% of their vote, with the Carter support in the black precincts decisive. Westward and along the Florida border Decatur (Bainbridge) proved to be a fairly close call for the Georgian (3,736-2,500), and Thomas (Thomasville) and Lowndes (Valdosta) went for him by less than 2-1. The less populous counties, (Echols, Clinch, Brooks, Grady, Seminole, and Charlton) wished the Georgia candidate in office by an overwhelming 3-1 ratio.

Fall line urban areas (Muscogee, Bibb, Baldwin, Richmond) supported the Democrat with 64%; southern urban areas (Chatham, Dougherty, Lowndes, Glynn) 58%; northern urban areas (Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Gwinnett, Floyd, Clarke, Whitfield) 62%. It is clear that the black vote was important in all these sectors. Carter, in fact, received some 500,000 votes—over half his total for the state—from these urban enclaves.

Some oddities and bits of incidental information that relate to the complete Georgia vote for president in 1976 are contained in the write-in information (not here reprinted as part of the final county returns). The total Carter vote of 979,409 for the Democratic presidential electors should be supplemented by twenty write-in votes to reach a final total. Ford got ten write-ins to go with his 483,743, and Mrs. Ford received a pair as well.

Eugene McCarthy, who had been the maverick of the Democratic Party in 1968, showed some strength as a write-in candidate and received almost 1,000 votes. Georgia's second presidential candidate in the 1976 sweepstakes, Lester Maddox, secured 1,071 write-ins, and Tom Anderson (American Party) polled 1,168. Jerry Brown pulled 53 write-ins, and Peter Camejo 43. As partial proof that old political soldiers never die it might be noted that Calvin Coolidge and Eugene Debs both got a write-in for president, and perennial Thomas Jefferson received two. Richard Nixon got 13, Ronald Reagan 379, George Wallace 36, and even Harold Wilson was accorded a vote. It may be a sign of the times that Linda Lovelace outpolled the "Good Lord," even in Georgia, by 2-1.

Nationally, Georgia's 68% vote for Carter—a figure reached as a result of his grassroots support in the less populous counties of the state—led the country. Only Arkansas's 65% endorsement came close, followed by West Virginia's 58%, Massachusetts' 57%, and North Carolina's, Rhode Island's, South Carolina's, and Tennessee's 56%.⁷ With Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Hawaii, and Missouri also voting Democratic, the election seemed to some observers to echo a return to the days preceding the Civil War. In 1976 New York and Pennsylvania were once again found voting with a solid South (save for Virginia). Only this time the candidate—and the winner—was the man from Georgia, the man from Plains.⁸

NOTES

¹Atlanta *Constitution*, 3 November 1976.

²Atlanta *Journal*, 3 November 1976.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Athens *Banner-Herald*, 3 November 1976.

⁵Atlanta *Constitution*, 4 November 1976.

⁶The North East Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission includes the following counties in a grouping: Elbert, Oconee, Walton, Barrow, Madison, Jackson, Morgan, Oglethorpe, Greene, and Clarke.

⁷Atlanta *Journal*, 4 November 1976. The District of Columbia, although not a state, led all with 84% of its vote for Jimmy Carter.

⁸The author would like particularly to thank Mrs. Edna Parham who rendered invaluable assistance in calculating vote totals and percentages. Also of help was 1976 *Georgia Statistical Register*, Lorena Akioka and Carolyn Hudgins, eds. (Athens: 1977).

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS
GENERAL ELECTION

Date November 2, 1976

JIMMY CARTER GERALD R. FORD
WALTER F. MONDALE ROBERT J. DOLE

COUNTY	Democratic	Republican
Appling	3585	961
Atkinson	1560	347
Bacon	2395	594
Baker	1162	305
Baldwin	4674	3612
Banks	2387	330
Barrow	4756	1364
Bartow	8166	1876
Ben Hill	2449	814
Berrien	3394	555
Bibb	31902	12819
Bleckley	2605	972
Brantley	2294	358
Brooks	2653	1102
Bryan	2045	761
Bulloch	5199	3156
Burke	3014	1565
Butts	2898	819
Calhoun	1394	436
Camden	2962	995
Candler	1388	646
Carroll	10050	3640
Catoosa	6020	3799
Charlton	1750	452
Chatham	32075	24160
Chattahoochee	506	178
Chattooga	4686	1087
Cherokee	6539	2609
Clarke	11342	6610
Clay	947	295
Clayton	21432	12905
Clinch	1414	383
Cobb	45002	34324
Coffee	4601	1417
Colquitt	6928	2181

Columbia	4674	3423
Cook	2882	670
Coweta	6195	3044
Crawford	1842	378
Crisp	3747	1328
Dade	2263	1388
Dawson	1384	370
Decatur	3736	2500
DeKalb	86872	67160
Dodge	5267	848
Dooly	2441	655
Dougherty	11461	9337
Douglas	7805	3959
Early	2405	1157
Echols	585	111
Effingham	2906	1654
Elbert	4730	961
Emanuel	4603	1493
Evans	1631	746
Fannin	3402	2646
Fayette	3718	2837
Floyd	15151	7713
Forsyth	4693	1443
Franklin	4192	687
Fulton	129849	61552
Gilmer	2499	1261
GlascocK	704	371
Glynn	9459	5403
Gordon	6052	1698
Grady	3758	1209
Greene	2534	652
Gwinnett	20838	13912
Habersham	5120	1315
Hall	12804	5093
Hancock	2117	651
Haralson	4550	1301
Harris	2861	1544
Hart	4605	860
Heard	1593	433
Henry	5717	2622
Houston	13164	5404
Irwin	2012	561

Jackson	5931	1239
Jasper	1852	689
Jeff Davis	2405	622
Jefferson	3115	1309
Jenkins	1820	563
Johnson	2210	698
Jones	3471	1317
Lamar	2785	847
Lanier	1269	207
Laurens	8617	3281
Lee	1727	1110
Liberty	3328	979
Lincoln	1583	576
Long	1243	222
Lowndes	8830	4512
Lumpkin	2301	547
Macon	3013	638
Madison	3367	1115
Marion	1314	291
McDuffie	3024	1694
McIntosh	1978	535
Meriwether	4830	1450
Miller	1536	476
Mitchell	4495	1572
Monroe	2962	1078
Montgomery	1610	626
Morgan	2274	904
Murray	3511	889
Muscogee	24092	13406
Newton	6294	2137
Oconee	2228	1184
Oglethorpe	1854	811
Paulding	5420	1432
Peach	3989	1163
Pickens	2571	973
Pierce	2628	544
Pike	1903	776
Polk	6115	1944
Pulaski	2318	485
Putnam	2040	835
Quitman	677	313
Rabun	2398	591

Randolph	2186	747
Richmond	24042	17893
Rockdale	4640	2974
Schley	783	268
Screven	2168	1176
Seminole	2074	681
Spalding	7593	3739
Stephens	5560	1340
Stewart	1632	433
Sumter	5328	2053
Talbot	1634	459
Taliaferro	748	236
Tattnall	3556	1326
Taylor	1962	504
Telfair	3534	637
Terrell	2348	1168
Thomas	6147	3263
Tift	5185	2162
Toombs	4047	2126
Towns	1786	1175
Treutlen	1567	465
Troup	7699	4422
Turner	2265	416
Twiggs	2515	513
Union	2795	1154
Upton	4219	2897
Walker	8007	4807
Walton	5402	1687
Ware	7719	2661
Warren	1335	720
Washington	3865	1657
Wayne	4489	1499
Webster	622	165
Wheeler	1378	344
White	2125	625
Whitfield	10475	4498
Wilcox	2153	346
Wilkes	2461	1067
Wilkinson	2652	837
Worth	2790	1156
TOTAL	979,409	483,743