

# The Carter Administration

## READING FOCUS

- What changes did Jimmy Carter bring to the presidency?
- How did Carter deal with domestic issues?
- What ideals guided Carter's foreign policy?
- What factors influenced the outcome of the 1980 election?

## MAIN IDEA

Jimmy Carter's human rights diplomacy brought notable accomplishments in foreign policy, but his inability to work effectively with Congress blocked the success of his domestic programs.

## KEY TERMS

incumbent  
deregulation  
amnesty  
affirmative action  
Camp David Accords  
dissident

## TAKING NOTES

Copy the chart below. As you read, fill in the major initiatives President Carter took and the results of each action.

The Carter Administration		
Policy	Action	Result
Economy	Cut government spending	Increased unemployment and business failures
Energy		
Civil Rights		
Foreign Relations		

**Setting the Scene** The 1976 presidential campaign brought surprises for both political parties. Gerald Ford, who said at first that he would not be a candidate for President, later changed his mind. Even though Ford was the **incumbent**—the current office holder—he faced strong opposition from conservative fellow Republicans inside his own party. The Democrats nominated a candidate few Americans had even heard of at the start of the campaign: James Earl (“Jimmy”) Carter, Jr., a former governor of Georgia. Carter went on to defeat Ford by a narrow margin.

In his Inaugural Address, President Carter outlined his beliefs:

“The American dream endures. We must once again have full faith in our country—and in one another. . . . Our commitment to human rights must be absolute, our laws fair, our natural beauty preserved; the powerful must not persecute the weak, and human dignity must be enhanced.”

—Jimmy Carter, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1977

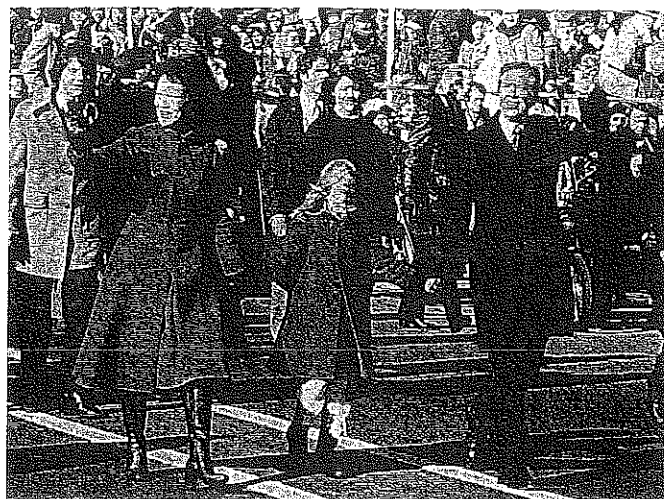
Abandoning the traditional limousine ride, President Jimmy Carter takes an inaugural stroll with his wife Rosalynn and daughter Amy.

## Carter's Presidency

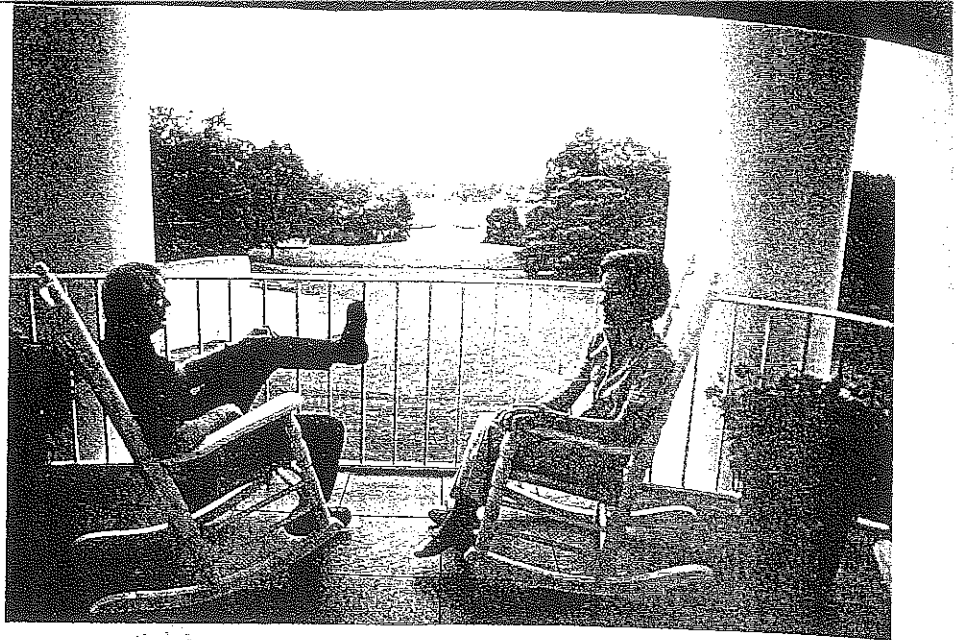
Jimmy Carter, a southerner with no national political experience, was different from his recent predecessors in the White House. His family had lived for generations in the rural South. A 1946 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Carter served as an engineering officer on nuclear submarines. When his father died, he took over management of the family's peanut farm and warehouse. He entered politics in 1962 and was elected governor of Georgia in 1970.

Carter was a born-again Baptist whose deeply felt religious faith was central to his view of the world. While holding his own strong religious beliefs, though, Carter respected those of others.

At first, people responded warmly to Carter's “down home” approach. They loved it when he and his wife Rosalynn dismissed their limousine after the inauguration and strolled



**VIEWING HISTORY** The Carters brought an informal style to the presidency. In spite of the President's low-key image, he was known among friends as a "super-achiever." **Identifying Central Issues** *Why do you think Carter's style appealed to many people?*



### READING CHECK

How did Carter attempt to become a different kind of President?

down Pennsylvania Avenue with their young daughter. He spoke to the nation on television wearing a cardigan sweater instead of a business suit. He eliminated many of the ceremonial details of White House life, such as trumpets to announce his entrance at official receptions. Some critics, however, began to complain about a lack of dignity and ceremony in the presidency.

The new President appointed many more women and minorities to his staff than previous administrations had done. Of about 1,200 full-time appointees, 12 percent were women, 12 percent were African American, and another 4 percent were Hispanic. In nominating federal judges, he chose four times as many women as had all previous Presidents combined.

Carter's lack of connections to Washington had helped him in the election campaign, since he had not been tarnished by failure or scandal. Once he became President, though, the "Washington outsider" role had disadvantages. The White House staff and other close advisors were also southerners, mostly Georgians. They had little sense of how crucial it was for the President to work with Congress. Carter himself was uneasy with Congress's demands and found it difficult to get legislation passed. He had no congressional experience and no former colleagues in Congress. He lacked Lyndon Johnson's ability to win over reluctant politicians.

## Carter's Domestic Policies

Jimmy Carter had little success in promoting his domestic programs. Looking back, he wrote, "I quickly learned that it is a lot easier to hold a meeting, reach a tentative agreement, or make a speech than to get a controversial program through Congress."

That was not the only problem. As the *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker observed, Carter "never established a politically coherent administration." His strategies were not clearly defined. Public support faded as his programs floundered.

**Economic Issues** Carter inherited an unstable economy. Like his predecessors, he had trouble controlling inflation without hurting economic growth. To prevent another recession, Carter tried to stimulate the economy with government deficit spending. As deficits grew, the Federal Reserve Board increased the money supply. However, inflation then rose to about 10 percent.

In an attempt to stop inflation, slow the economy, and reduce the deficit, Carter then cut federal spending. The cuts fell mostly on social programs.

angering liberal Democrats. At the same time, the slowdown in the economy increased unemployment and the number of business failures. The situation became worse in 1980, when the new federal budget called for increased government spending. In reaction, bond prices fell and interest rates soared. Americans lost confidence in Carter and his economic advisors.

**Deregulation** Carter had more success in the area of deregulation—the reduction or removal of government controls in several industries. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, agencies such as the Interstate Commerce Commission had been established to regulate rates and business practices. Over time, government regulations had multiplied. Carter argued that they hurt competition and increased consumer costs.

To encourage greater energy production, Carter proposed removing controls on prices for oil and natural gas. He also took steps to deregulate the railroad, trucking, and airline industries. While consumer groups and many liberal Democrats opposed deregulation, it continued during the next two administrations, both of which were Republican.

**Energy Issues** In the late 1970s, more than 40 percent of the oil used in the United States came from other countries. OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, had been raising oil prices steadily since 1973. In April 1977, Carter presented his energy program to Congress and the public. He asked people to save fuel by driving less and using less heat and air conditioning in their homes and offices. He also created a new Cabinet department, the Department of Energy, to coordinate the federal programs promoting conservation and researching new energy sources. Carter called the need for energy conservation the “moral equivalent of war.”

Representatives from states that produced oil and gas fiercely opposed Carter’s energy plan. Many proposals were stalled in Congress for months. In 1978, though, the National Energy Act finally passed. It included these directives:

1. Tax sales of inefficient, “gas-guzzling,” cars.
2. Convert new utilities to fuels other than oil or natural gas.
3. Deregulate prices for domestic oil and natural gas.
4. Provide tax credits or loans to homeowners for using solar energy and improving the insulation in their homes.
5. Fund research for alternative energy sources such as solar energy and synthetic fuels.

Nuclear power seemed to be a promising alternative energy source. Serious questions remained about its cost and safety, however. In March 1979, people’s doubts appeared to be confirmed by an accident at the nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. A partial meltdown of the reactor core occurred, releasing some radiation. About 140,000 people who lived near the plant fled their homes, terrified by the idea of a radioactive leak. The story made headlines around the world.

## COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES On Nuclear Energy

The need to reduce the dependence on foreign oil prompted viewpoints strongly for and against nuclear power.

**Analyzing Viewpoints** What are the main concerns of each of the speakers below?

### *In Favor of Nuclear Energy*

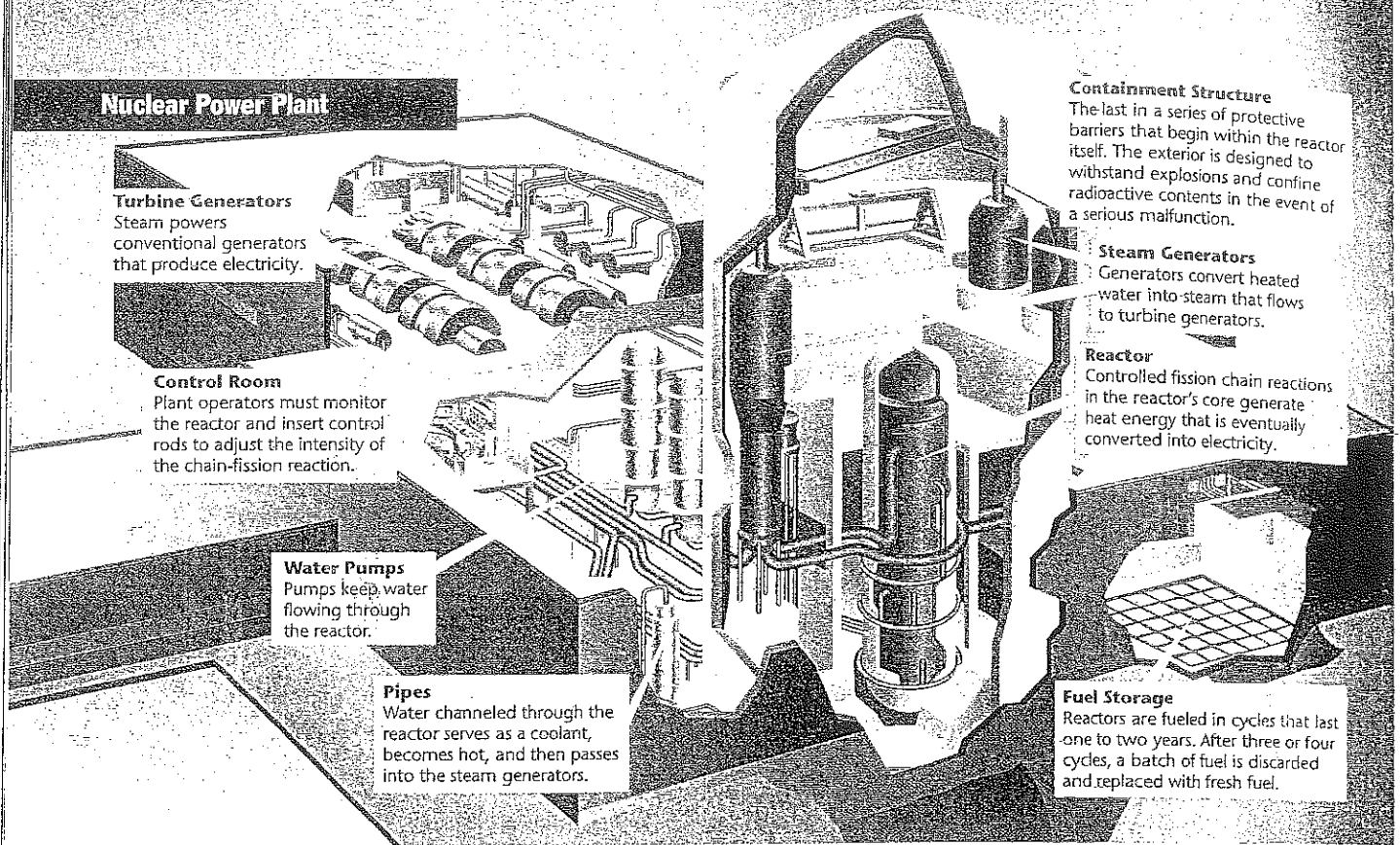
“When you debate the issue of nuclear energy, you are actually debating the issue of growth. Growth will be the key issue for the remainder of this century, and it is the resolution of that issue which will determine the lifestyles of most Americans for generations. . . . Economic growth has been inextricably linked to the growth of the supply of energy throughout history.”

—Senator James A. McClure (Idaho), addressing the National Conference on Energy Advocacy, February 2, 1979

### *Opposed to Nuclear Energy*

“If this country . . . continues to rely more and more on nuclear power a meltdown disaster is almost predictable. . . . For years now, the utilities and nuclear power industry have refused to listen to scientific logic and reasoning concerning the dangers of this technology. . . . Perhaps it is time for emotion and for passion and for commitment to stir our souls and our hearts and our minds once again into action.”

—Dr. Helen Caldicott, in *Nuclear Madness, What You Can Do!*, 1980



### INTERPRETING DIAGRAMS

Inside a nuclear power plant, a series of steps lead to the production of electricity. **Synthesizing Information** What element is used to cool the reactor?

Carter named a commission to investigate the accident at Three Mile Island. The commission's report identified operator errors that had made the initial problem worse. In his response to the report, Carter noted "very serious shortcomings in the way that both the government and the utility industry regulate and manage nuclear power." He proposed reorganizing the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the agency in charge of nuclear power. He also called on utility companies to improve standards.

**Civil Rights Issues** Carter's concern for moral values influenced his approach to domestic questions. Soon after taking office, he carried out his promise to grant **amnesty**—a general pardon—to those who had evaded the draft during the Vietnam War. Because that war still divided Americans, reactions were mixed.

As governor of Georgia, Carter had had a good civil rights record. As President, Carter tried to move beyond the civil rights battles of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of Carter's staff appointments, such as the United Nations ambassadorship for Andrew Young, won the approval of African Americans. On the other hand, many African Americans were disappointed by the President's weak support for social programs.

In 1978, the Supreme Court ruled on a civil rights case that would have important effects on **affirmative action** policies. First enacted during Lyndon Johnson's presidency, such policies aim to make up for past discrimination against women and members of minority groups by increasing their opportunities in areas such as employment and education. Allan Bakke, a white applicant, was refused admission to the medical school at the University of California (Davis) in 1973 and 1974. He sued the school, saying that its affirmative action policy amounted to "reverse discrimination." Specifically, Bakke charged that the policy of reserving 16 of 100 class spaces for minority group applicants violated both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Constitution.

In a complex ruling in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the Court ordered that Bakke be admitted to the California medical school. It also upheld the school's right to consider race as one factor in admission decisions, but it did not allow the use of numerical quotas. While the Court decision supported the concept of affirmative action, the case signaled the start of a backlash against the policy.

## Carter's Foreign Policy

Although Jimmy Carter had little diplomatic experience when he took office, his personal beliefs greatly influenced his decisions on foreign affairs. Support for human rights was the cornerstone of Carter's foreign policy.

**Camp David Accords** Carter's commitment to finding ethical solutions to complicated problems was most visible in the Middle East. In that unstable region, Israel and the Arab nations had fought several wars, most recently in 1967 and 1973. In 1977, though, Egypt's President Anwar el-Sadat made a historic visit to Israel to begin negotiations with Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The two men had such different personalities, however, that they had trouble compromising. Carter intervened, sending Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to invite them to Camp David, the presidential retreat in the Maryland hills.

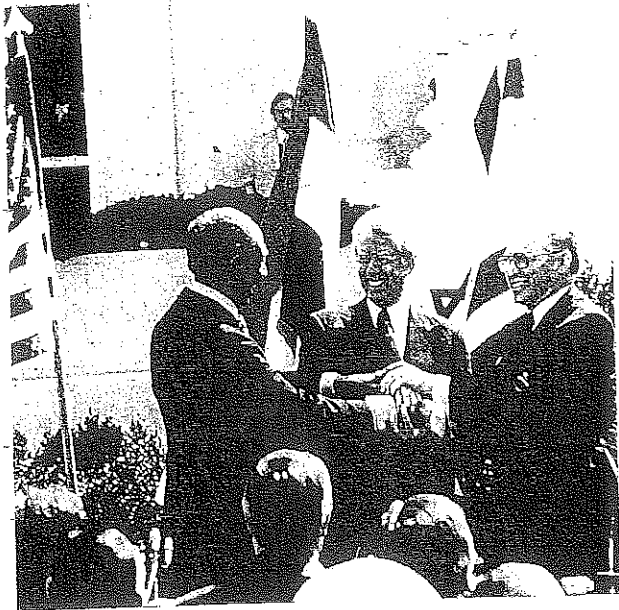
At Camp David in September 1978, Carter assumed the role of peacemaker. He practiced highly effective personal diplomacy to bridge the gap between Sadat and Begin. They finally agreed on a framework for peace that became known as the **Camp David Accords**. Under the resulting peace treaty, Israel would withdraw from the Sinai peninsula, which it had occupied since 1967. Egypt, in return, became the first Arab country to recognize Israel's existence as a nation.

The Camp David Accords, of course, did not solve all the problems in the Middle East. Among the remaining problems were issues concerning the Palestinians. Many had fled their homes when Arab nations declared war on Israel immediately after that country was established in 1948. Still, as Secretary of State Vance noted:

*"The Camp David Accords rank as one of the most important achievements of the Carter administration. First, they opened the way to peace between Egypt and Israel, which transformed the entire political, military, and strategic character of the Middle East dispute. Genuine peace between Egypt and Israel meant there would be no major Arab-Israeli war, whatever the positions of [other Arab groups]."*

—Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices*

**Soviet-American Relations** Several issues complicated the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Détente was at a high point when Carter took office. However, Carter's stand on human rights angered Soviet leaders, undermining the efforts of the two nations to work together. The Soviets were especially annoyed when the President spoke in support of Soviet **dissidents**—writers and other activists who criticized the actions of their government. Soviet citizens were denied the right to speak freely or to criticize their political leaders. Carter believed that such rights were essential



**VIEWING HISTORY** President Carter congratulates Egypt's President Sadat (left) and Israel's Prime Minister Begin (right) on the signing of the Camp David Accords. **Drawing Conclusions** What were the major achievements of the accords?

## Focus on WORLD EVENTS

**The Panama Canal** In the early 1900s, President Theodore Roosevelt had been proud of the way the United States had gained control of land for the Panama Canal. Many Latin Americans, though, resented the continuing United States presence in Panama.

In spite of bitter debate in Congress, in 1978 President Carter convinced the Senate to ratify two treaties dealing with the canal. One treaty was an agreement to return the canal to Panama by the year 2000. The other gave the United States the right to take military action to keep the canal open. The pacts protected American interests while improving relations with Latin America.

**VIEWING HISTORY** Iranian protestors express anti-American sentiment in Tehran, where the American embassy was seized. Identifying Central Issues What events led to the hostage crisis?



and was outspoken in defending them, even when such a defense caused international friction.

In spite of the discord, a second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) led Carter and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to sign a new treaty in June 1979. More complicated than SALT I, this agreement limited the number of nuclear warheads and missiles held by each superpower.

Late in 1979, before the Senate could ratify SALT II, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, a country on its southern border, to bolster a Soviet-supported government there. Carter telephoned Brezhnev and told him that the invasion was "a clear threat to the peace." He added, "Unless you draw back from your present course of action, this will inevitably jeopardize the course of United States-Soviet relations throughout the world." A United Nations resolution also called for Soviet withdrawal.

Carter halted American grain shipments to the Soviet Union and took other steps to show United States disapproval of Soviet aggression. Realizing that SALT II surely would be turned down, he removed the treaty from Senate consideration. (Although SALT II was never approved by the Senate, both countries followed the terms of the treaty based on its signing.) Carter also imposed a boycott on the 1980 summer Olympic Games to be held in Moscow. Eventually, some 60 other nations joined the Olympic boycott. Détente was effectively dead.

**The Iran Hostage Crisis** Iran, Afghanistan's neighbor to the west, was the scene of the worst foreign policy crisis of the Carter administration. For years the United States had supported the shah (or king) of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The shah had taken many steps to modernize Iran. He was also a reliable supplier of oil and a pro-Western force in the region. For these reasons, Americans overlooked the corruption and harsh repression of the shah's government.

In January 1979, revolution broke out in Iran. It was led by Muslim fundamentalists, who wanted to bring back traditional ways, and by liberal critics of the shah, who wanted more political and economic reforms. As the revolution spread, the shah fled the country. He was replaced by an elderly Islamic leader, the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, who had been in exile. Khomeini and his followers were aggressively anti-Western and planned to make Iran a strict Islamic state.

In October, out of concern for the shah's health, Carter let him enter the United States for medical treatment. Many Iranians were outraged. On November 4, 1979, angry followers of Khomeini seized the American embassy in Tehran and took Americans, mostly embassy workers, hostage.

For 444 days, revolutionaries imprisoned 52 hostages in different locations. The prisoners were blindfolded and moved from place to place. Some were tied up and beaten. Others spent time in solitary confinement and faced mock executions intended to terrorize them. One of the hostages, Kathryn Koob, described part of her experiences:

*"[T]he sounds outside the embassy were nerve-wracking. . . . There seemed to be a continuous crowd of people shouting anti-American slogans, listening to the exhortations [cries] of the students and mullahs [clergymen] who were always on hand. In addition to the crowd noises, there were three or four loud-speakers blaring newscasts. . . . As I sat confined in my chair I thought . . . I just can't take this."*

—Kathryn Koob, *Guest of the Revolution*

Meanwhile, the American public became more impatient for the hostages' release. President Carter tried many approaches to secure the hostages' freedom. He broke diplomatic relations with Iran and froze all Iranian assets in the United States. Khomeini held out, insisting that the shah be sent back for trial. In April 1980, Carter authorized a risky commando rescue mission. It ended in disaster when several helicopters broke down in the desert. In the retreat, two aircraft collided, killing eight American soldiers. The government was humiliated, and Carter's popularity dropped further. Even after the shah died in July, the standoff continued. Carter's chances for reelection appeared dim.

## The 1980 Election

Despite Carter's achievements in the Middle East and his commitment to serious goals, his administration had lost the confidence of many Americans. Rising inflation in early 1980 dropped his approval rating to 21 percent in public opinion polls. Unemployment was still over 7 percent. At times Carter himself seemed to have lost confidence. In two speeches in July, he spoke of a national "crisis of confidence" and a "national malaise."

In the Democratic primaries leading up to the 1980 elections, Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy won a large number of delegate votes. Kennedy withdrew just as the Democratic National Convention began, however, and Carter was nominated again. Nonetheless, many people were ready for the optimism of the Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan. A leading conservative, Reagan had failed to win his party's nomination in 1976. In 1980, however, Reagan won the nomination, and went on to win the election by a landslide.

After months of secret talks, the Iranians agreed to release the 52 hostages in early 1981. Not until the day Carter left office, however, were they allowed to come home. Newly elected President Reagan sent Carter, as a private citizen, to greet the hostages as they arrived at a U.S. military base in West Germany.



WELCOME  
HOME  
TO  
FREEDOM

**VIEWING HISTORY** Jubilant Americans returned home after being held hostage by Iranians. **Drawing Conclusions** How did Carter's handling of the hostage crisis affect his career?

## Section

## 5

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. What is an **incumbent**?
2. What issues concerning **deregulation**, **amnesty**, and **affirmative action** came up during Carter's presidency?
3. What were the **Camp David Accords**?
4. Why did the United States and the Soviet Union clash over Soviet **dissidents**?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Making Comparisons** List examples of the positive and negative results of Carter's approach to foreign policy.
6. **Writing a Letter to the Editor** Write a letter in which you support or oppose Carter's program to conserve energy.



### Take It to the NET

**Activity: Brainstorming**  
Research the Iran Hostage Crisis. With your class, explore alternative ways that could have been used to approach the crisis. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.  
[www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com)