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Book Review - A Boy from Georgia: Coming of Age in the Segregated South

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Off the SHELF

A Boy from Georgia: Coming of Age in the Segregated South by Hamilton Jordan; edited by Kathleen Jordan and Hamilton Jordan, Jr.; foreword by President Jimmy Carter (University of Georgia Press, 2015, ISBN 978-0-8203-4889-6, \$32.95)

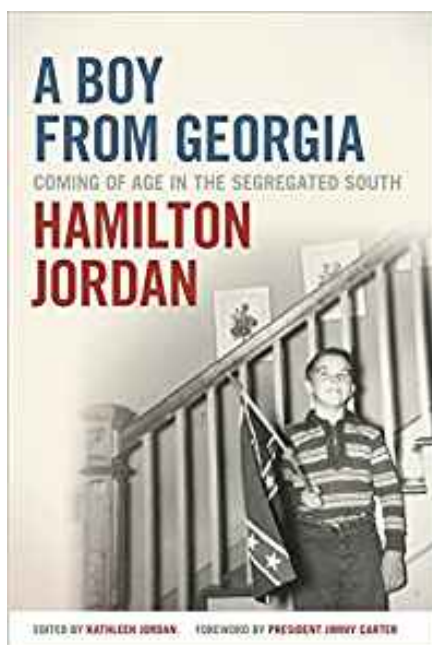
A Boy from Georgia chronicles Hamilton Jordan's coming-of-age and early adulthood in segregation-era Georgia. Jordan, who served both as a key advisor to Jimmy Carter's 1976 presidential campaign and as White House chief of staff from 1979 to 1980, died in 2008 of peritoneal mesothelioma, leaving this memoir incomplete. It was finished, therefore, by his daughter Kathleen who concludes that Carter was the "ultimate hero" to her father, as the president demonstrated that Jordan could continue to "work for progress and social justice while still maintaining a healthy pride in his home state and the South."

Indeed, the primary theme of this autobiography is the tension between the segregationist milieu in which Jordan matured and the intensifying demands for extending civil rights to African Americans that he witnessed. For example, Jordan learned about politics and current events from his segregationist grandfather, a judge from the small agricultural village of Lexington, whereas Jordan hailed from Albany, a large, majority African American town that was the urban center of southwestern Georgia. Although he was still a minor at the time of the 1961 Albany Movement that championed the cause of desegregation within the city, Jordan wrote that he long felt shame of

his ignorance to the system of segregation to which he believed he lent tacit support by his silence.

Not until his 1963 internship for the segregationist senator Richard Russell did Jordan seem to become aware of the two directions in which he was being pulled. After listening to President Kennedy speak about civil rights during a White House reception and witnessing the March on Washington as an

unofficial representative for Senator Russell's office, Jordan realized that he was no longer proud of his connection to the prominent legislator for whom he was then working. Upon his return to Georgia, Jordan forged a closer relationship with his uncle Clarence, the "black sheep of the family," who founded the interracial commune of Koinonia. Then, in 1966, Jordan wrote a letter to Jimmy Carter, who later invited the young man to work on his first gubernatorial campaign, an election Carter lost in a close runoff to segregationist Lester Maddox.



This book does not focus solely on civil rights. Jordan also included his perspectives on other prominent issues and people of the day, such as his sister's battle with polio and the overblown fears of a Communist incursion into Albany. He also recounted stories of hiring Otis Redding to perform at a high school dance and observing President Johnson profanely berate his staff. Perhaps most influential to Jordan and his children, though, was his discovery of his maternal grandmother's Jewish heritage, a story that remained forever incomplete due to

the family's refusal to discuss the issue openly in the anti-Semitic climate of mid-twentieth century Georgia.

Though published by a university press, this work is conversational in tone and is

recommended for scholars and non-academic readers alike. It is appropriate both for academic and for public libraries.

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