

# Ford and Carter Promise They'll Stress the Issues

## A Subdued Exchange

By R. W. Apple Jr.  
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President Ford and Jimmy Carter concluded their historic series of nationally televised debates last night by promising to stress issues rather than personalities in the final days of the campaign.

The tone of the third debate between the presidential rivals, which took place on the campus of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., was subdued and almost conciliatory, with the exception of a barb or two near the end. Both men were notably relaxed throughout the 90-minute debate.

Carter expressed regret at having granted an interview to Playboy magazine, in which he discussed lust in earthy language, and conceded that he had not known exactly "how to deal with" the furor that was raised by the interview. In retrospect, he said, "I would not have given that interview."

Mr. Ford, for his part, said he had been "guilty" of what he called "rather graphic language" in the campaign.

The former Georgia governor's toughest words in the debate came in an attack on the President's economic record — a record that Mr. Ford said "the American people understand and appreciate."

Chuckling, Carter replied that the President "ought to be ashamed of making that statement" in view of current high unemployment rates.

Mr. Ford's management of the economy, Carter said, "shows a callous indifference to the families that have suffered so very much."

Apparently stung by the criticism, the President responded a few moments later by asserting, as he had in the opening debate, that Carter was "inconsistent in many of the positions he takes" and that he "tends to distort" the facts.

Ranging over a wide variety of issues — including the worthiness of their respective running mates, the situation in Yugoslavia, the state of the cities, government spending and the recent remarks of General George Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — the two candidates boxed cautiously, like a pair of prizefighters fearful

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of suffering a knockout in a late round.

Both pitched their arguments squarely to the center of the ideological spectrum, although a series of questions on abortion and other social issues seemed to push Carter to the left. He opposed, and the President supported, for example, a constitutional amendment on school prayers.

Neither man appeared to have put the other on the defensive or to have clearly seized the initiative last night.

At the end, each had a few concluding words, with Mr. Ford sounding the theme of his campaign, "Peace with freedom." The American people under his administration, he argued, are "healed, moving again — well on the road to prosperity — at peace." With his hands folded before him, he asked for votes for a full term of his own.

Carter viewed the state of the nation differently, arguing that the "American people are ready for a change" because of weak leadership.

"We've been drifting too long," he said. "We've been dormant too long. We've been discouraged too long."

The first question was put to Mr. Ford, and it dealt with the sacrifices that he thought Americans would be asked to make in the next administration.

Mr. Ford responded that some sacrifices would be necessary "to maintain an adequate military capability" while maintaining prosperity. But he said that they would not be so great as to prevent a "long overdue and totally justified tax decrease for the middle-income people."

Carter said that, if he were elected, "the sacrifices would be much less." He, too, promised help for middle-income Americans.

Carter was then asked why he thought the voters appeared so apathetic about the presidential campaign this year and what responsibility he was prepared to accept for the "low level of the campaign for the nation's highest office."

The Democratic candidate said that he believed that the major reason was "the deep discouragement of the American people about the performance of public officials." He spoke of inflation, government spending deficits, the "aftermath" of Watergate, the Vietnam war and the secret bombing of Cambodia.

Both Carter and the President, in a rebuttal, said they would try to conduct the final days of the campaign on a higher plane. Mr. Ford said he believed Americans were "turned off" by Watergate and Vietnam, but said that as he moved around the country, he found "greater interest in the campaign."

Mr. Ford was again asked for a fuller explanation of his role in halting an investigation in 1972 by the House Banking and Currency Committee of the funding of the Watergate break-in. He replied, as he has in the past, that the various authorities who had examined his role had accorded him "a clean bill of health."

But the President declined to call, as his questioner suggested, for making available relevant tape recordings made by former President Nixon that presumably would refute or confirm charges by John Dean, Mr. Nixon's former counsel, that Mr. Ford had acted at the direction of the Nixon White House.

The tapes, Mr. Ford said, were under the jurisdiction of the courts. "That's for the proper authorities who have control over those tapes to make that decision," he said. For the first time in the three debates, a candidate declined to respond. That was Carter, on the Watergate question.

Mr. Ford was asked about "embarrassing" remarks made in an interview by General George Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who cited Israel as a military burden and made other seemingly disparaging remarks about Britain and Iran.

The President noted that the general had apologized for the comments and did not deserve to

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be dismissed. He also cited Brown's "exemplary record of military performance."

Carter, in a brief response, noted that it was the second time Brown had been obliged to apologize for public comments—the first was a reference to alleged Jewish influence in the nation.

Mr. Ford and Carter then engaged in a sparring match about the respective qualifications of the two senators who share their tickets as vice presidential nominees. Both said their running mates are fully qualified to serve as President.

On a question about the environment, one of the issues on which the Carter and Ford records are most divergent, the President defended his record of vetoing legislation supported by environmentalists and supporting delays in enforcement of air and water pollution standards.

He said, for example, that there was an "overwhelming consensus" that legislation that would have regulated strip mining would have led to a loss of jobs and damaged the nation's efforts toward energy independence.

Carter declared, "This administration's record on environment is very bad." He said that he would have signed the strip-mining bill, and he promised to uphold efforts to upgrade the environment. He also criticized Mr. Ford for not taking stronger action to limit the spread of nuclear materials.

On Urban affairs, Carter said he would favor a revenue-sharing program for local governments and added that a "major thrust" of a Carter administration would be to "put people back to work" in the central cities.

Mr. Ford, in response, defended his administration's record, citing general revenue-sharing programs that channel \$6 billion to American cities, \$3.3 billion in community development funds and other payments to local governments.

Carter said that he would not actively support proposed constitutional amendments that would outlaw abortion, prevent busing for school desegregation or permit prayers in public schools.

Mr. Ford, on the other hand, said that he favored an amendment that would allow states, through public referendums, to forbid abortions, and he asserted that there was "some merit" to a proposed amendment that would permit "voluntary prayer" in schools.

Mr. Ford was then asked why he remained steadfast in his opposition to any federal laws to control handguns, particularly in view of

the fact that handguns had twice been used in attempts on his life.

He replied that the registration of either handguns or their owners had not reduced the use of such weapons in the commission of crimes. Mr. Ford said he thought he would be inappropriate to "penalize the legitimate handgun owners" by passage of federal controls.

Carter, in his response, noted that he had been a "hunter all my life," and owned shotguns, rifles and a handgun. He said the registration of handguns would not prohibit access by criminals, although it could bar ownership by the mentally incompetent and others clearly not qualified.

Addressing a question about how, if elected president, he intended to select nominees for the Supreme Court, Carter said that he would adopt the practice that he began as governor of Georgia, of appointing an "objective panel" to provide him a list "of the five, or seven, or ten best-qualified persons in the country" from which he would choose a nominee.

Mr. Ford said that his future nominations to the high court would reflect the same judgment that led to his selection of John Paul Stevens, the only justice he has named so far, and who he noted had been "overwhelmingly" approved by a Democratic Congress.

Just as they had in the first television debate last month, the candidates addressed a question about the economy by reciting a series of statistics, but they added little to their often-stated positions.