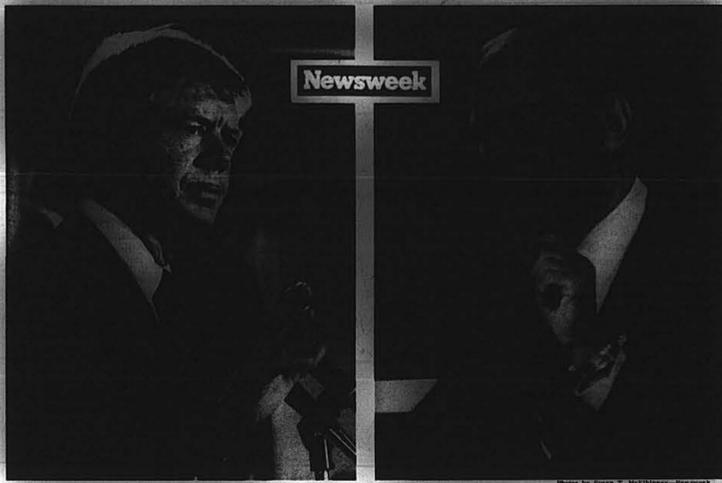


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Good polls for the incumbent, a slight slip by the challenger—and a feeling that the election might be close

On to the Great Debates

For Gerald Ford, it was a weeklong Rocky Mountain high. Plainly quite pleased with his bravura performance in Kansas City, the President relaxed in the rarefied atmosphere of Vail, Colo., dancing, golfing—and firming up plans for the fall. He rescheduled his top campaign aide, invited Vice President Nelson Rockefeller and former Treasury Secretary John Connally for some strategizing and dispatched a brace of aides to California in an attempt to entice Ronald Reagan to take to the hustings on his behalf. He tried out a tough new line of attack, criticizing Jimmy Carter's "indecision and flip-flops." And he once again upstaged the Carter camp with a carefully calculated suggestion on the timing and length of what was becoming the centerpiece of his electoral strategy—a series of debates with his Democratic challenger.

The mood inside the Vail White House was euphoric. "I really think we're going to beat the guy," exulted one of the President's top aides who had not thought so a few weeks ago. The first post-convention Gallup poll—the numbers showed Ford trailing Carter by only 10 points (49-39), compared with a 33-point gap immediately after Carter's nomination—suggested that the President had in fact narrowed the margin to within striking

distance. A 10-point gap, Connally observed, was "no hill for a stepper." Carter professed great concern at his sudden slippage, noting calmly that polls usually level off after both parties have chosen their nominees. He set out on a campaign swing designed to audition his populist themes and yoke the Ford Administration solidly to the Nixon years. With Republican Vice Presidential nominee Robert Dole dogging his footsteps all the way, Carter was forced at one point to modify his position on U.S. grain policies (page 14). It was a minor vulnerability and added to speculation that the balloting on Nov. 2 would be close after all.

The high point of that campaign promised to be the televised Presidential debates, the first since John Kennedy and Richard Nixon faced each other sixteen years ago. Ford proposed a crisp set of ground rules: four 90-minute debates with the first—on national defense—to be held shortly after Labor Day. Ford's prescriptions were designed to give him an advantage—he

is knowledgeable on defense, and the 90-minute length would give him ample time to prove it—but as expected, Carter aides rejected the proposals. "We had always assumed that there was time to sit down and discuss proposals in a mature and businesslike fashion," said press secretary Jody Powell.

Late last week they did just that. Representatives of both sides showed up promptly for a meeting called by the League of Women Voters to negotiate the debates. Sipping tea and orange juice and indulging in friendly banter at Washington's steamy Mayflower Hotel, they

The President war-games in Vail with Connally, Dole and Rockefeller: Relying on the heartland



tentatively agreed to start the debates on Sept. 23—two weeks later than Ford proposed and one week earlier than Carter had wanted. They also concurred on the format: questions from newsmen with each candidate given the opportunity to rebut the other's answers. That left the length, number, time and place of the square-offs to be decided at a meeting this week, but there seemed little chance that the debates would be derailed. "They're on the track," declared William Ruckelshaus, one of Ford's representatives at the meeting. "Unless something unexpected pops up, this week's meeting will wind it up."

Prickly: No one seemed more eager for the showdown than President Ford. Still 10 points down in the polls, he felt he had nothing to lose in a confrontation with Carter. "The debates play to all the President's strengths and all Carter's weaknesses," said one staffer. Aides say Ford will try to expose Carter as shallow, vague and prickly under pressure, while simultaneously demonstrating his own command of the issues and knowledge of government. He intends to devote as much or more time to preparing for the debates as he did for his highly successful acceptance speech at the Kansas City convention. Media specialist Mark Goode has agreed to work with Ford speech coach Don Penny to hone the President's style, and Ford aides hope to analyze Carter's techniques by watching videotapes of selected primary appearances. The President's men may also recruit Carter stand-ins from the administration for dry-run debates with Ford on economics and domestic and foreign policy.

Even without doing his homework, Ford brings many assets to a debate. He does not lose his composure under fire, he has a flair for handling facts and figures (his presentation of the budget to the press last winter was widely admired), and after 25 years in politics, he knows the issues and intricacies of government. But the President also has some serious drawbacks as a debater. He does not think particularly fast on his feet. He is a plodder, sometimes embarrassingly inarticulate extemporaneous speaker. Even his greatest strength, his command of details, can make him boring and pedes-

trian if he goes on too long. By contrast, Ford campaign aides concede, Carter is strong on what one caustically calls "the 30-second oversimplification," and could outpoint Ford if the President cannot also offer persuasive generalities. Carter said he was eager for action. "I have no fear of [the debates] at all," he said. Carter's handlers believe he can win an important psychological advantage if, given his reputation for vagueness, he shows himself to be a knowledgeable and specific debater in sessions with Ford. He has begun immersing himself in the issues of the campaign. He has ordered his issues task forces to put together special briefings laying out his strong and weak points in every field and he even has arranged for a computer hookup on his campaign plane that plugs into The New York Times microfilm library. Carter, like Ford, has little previous

debating experience. But he says he will not use a sparring partner, nor will he practice with videotapes. "We are not going to turn Jimmy into some sort of TV star," said Powell. Instead, aides believe Carter's quick intelligence and his ability to speak eloquently without notes will put him one-up on Ford. "Carter can handle almost any question, any situation," says one staff man. "After all, he's been doing it for two years."

Young: Despite their outward confidence, the Carter men remained privately uneasy about the debates. "They realize he has huge gaps of knowledge Ford could exploit," says one source close to the campaign. Worried that television magnifies qualities such as aggressive-

THE GOP'S NEW TRAIL BOSS

Since Kansas City, James A. Baker III has been hailed as a political rookie who made good in the big leagues. Only three months earlier, he had been persuaded by the President to leave a job he liked (Under Secretary of Commerce) for one that he didn't want (convention delegate hunter for the Ford campaign). The tall, soft-spoken Texan succeeded spectacularly in rounding up the stray delegates that put Ford over the top. Last week, Jim Baker was rewarded with an even more difficult job: he was named Gerald Ford's campaign chairman.

Baker is new to national politics, but he is no political neophyte. A Texas Democrat in the John Connally-Lloyd Bentsen mold until he jumped to the GOP in 1968, Baker is a protégé of George Bush, now the CIA director. In 1970 Baker ran Bush's unsuccessful campaign for the Senate; at Bush's recommendation, Baker later went to the Commerce Department.

Blessed with good looks, wealth and personable manners, Baker, 46, seems almost a political natural. His background reflects Houston's moneyed elite: his great-grandfather founded Baker and Botts, now one of the biggest law firms in the country. But after Princeton and the University of Texas Law School, Jim Baker found he was unable to join the firm that bore the family name because of an anti-Semitic slur for months. Baker says, "I think we're going to be a lot of people." If he pulls off his surprise, it won't be the first time that he has turned Baker skeptics into Baker believers.

Baker: A rookie who made good

eventually earned a reputation as a top corporate lawyer. Baker admits that he has occasionally entertained the idea of running for Congress. He abandoned those plans when his wife died of cancer in 1970 and, though he has since remarried, Baker insists that he has lost interest in elective office—for himself.

Some Republican regulars would have preferred a bigger and better-known name at the head of the Ford campaign organization. But Baker's closest colleagues disagree. "Jim is one of those people who can take a dead organization and turn it around," says Ford chief of staff Richard Cheney. Behind his mild manner, Baker has already proved himself a man who can be as tough as he needs to be. "People have been selling us and this President short for months," Baker says. "I think we're going to be a lot of people." If he pulls off his surprise, it won't be the first time that he has turned Baker skeptics into Baker believers.

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Carter hears the Legion: Boos, but a media coup

ness, adman Jerry Rafshoon and others coaching Carter to curb his tongue. Giving him a hard-hitting line, says one of his campaigners, is like "giving firewater to an Indian." Some advisers also believe Carter should curtail his heavy travel schedule before each debate to make sure he is rested and fully briefed. Otherwise, they worry, Ford could goad the touchy candidate into a mistake.

Savvy: For the moment, the President was spending more time putting together his own campaign than trying to trip up Carter's. He booted campaign director Rogers C.B. Morton, whose questionable political judgment and penchant for inept quotes had frequently dismayed Ford staffers, into the largely honorific job of chairman of Ford's campaign steering committee. Morton's replacement, James Baker, the savvy Texas lawyer who clinched Ford's nomination over Reagan (page 13). The President welcomed heretofore reluctant warrior Connally to Vail and, after an evening in the chalet-style White House, Connally came out four-square for Ford. "I think it is critical, it is imperative that you be elected," he told the President, agreeing to campaign intensively. Ford's hopes for Reagan, still smarting from his fight-to-the-finish campaign, were less ambitious; he wanted his erstwhile rival to make a half-dozen speeches for the ticket, primarily in the West and South.

In long morning sessions, Ford also plotted his fall strategy with his brain-trusters and read his campaign primer, a 3-inch thick, heavily tabbed loose-leaf binder known simply as "The Planning Document." He and his aides

are awaiting extensive polling data from eighteen key states, including Texas, Mississippi and New York, before drawing up a final list of "target" states where they will make a maximum effort. Though some Ford aides were pushing an early trip to the South for pure shock effect ("I wonder what would happen if we put him in a motorcade down Peachtree Street," mused one), NEWSWEEK learned that the Republicans intend to concede the Cotton South to Carter, with two exceptions: they think they have a good chance to defeat him in Louisiana because of the large Catholic vote, and in Mississippi because of growing GOP strength (the ultra-right American Independent Party's new candidate, former Georgia Gov. George Wallace, may drain some votes from Carter). Though Ford aides deny it they are also writing the Carter camp.

That left a heartland strategy anchored mostly in the industrial Midwest, and a go-for-broke reliance on the debates. The odds still seemed long. But Ford had finally crafted his campaign and, in the euphoria of the moment, the President and his advisers clearly believed they had a chance of springing the greatest political upset since Harry Truman beat Tom Dewey.

—SUSAN FRANKER with THOMAS M. DEFRANK in Vail, Colo. ELAINE SHANNON on the Carter campaign and JAMES DOTY in Washington

Dress Rehearsal

For more than a month, Jimmy Carter had been biding his time down in Plains—practicing up his best Presidential lines. Last week he emerged to present a final dress rehearsal for his fall campaign. In four days of lively campaigning on the West Coast and in the Farm Belt, Carter ran into a few bumps along the road. In Seattle, American Legionnaires booed him when he supported a pardon for Vietnam war resisters; in Iowa he attacked grain embargoes and then qualified his stand later, thus opening himself up to the old charge of two-facedness. But Carter apparently remained satisfied that he had succeeded in his main goals: to test his themes, patch up a few weak spots in his support—and carry the battle to the President well before Labor Day.

One of Carter's main themes will be to cast Ford as a decent man—and poor leader. To blunt Ford's own sharp attacks on free spending, do-everything Democrats in Congress, Carter delivered an acerbic Town Hall speech in Los Angeles, summoning up Ford's 55 victories and

accusing him of "political insensitivity... missed opportunities... and national neglect." He also set out to addle Ford with Richard Nixon—connection Carter believed would hurt Ford more than Carter's own, rather distant, ties to a Democratic Congress. "There's something terribly wrong," Carter argued, "when the members of Congress, all of whom were elected to their offices by the people, repeatedly pass legislation that the country needs—and then have it vetoed by an appointed President."

Glazed: Carter tried to look and sound like a populist, a role that took some agility when actor Warren Beatty threw a party for him. Beatty's guest list included singer Diana Ross, who asked regally about Carter's "conception of the Presidency." ("His eyes glazed over," reported producer Norman Lear later.) Carroll O'Connor acted out an odd spectacle: Archie Bunker defending detente against a Presidential nominee. Tony Randall urged Carter to support a national theater, ballet and opera, noting, "You've never met with people of this level." Carter replied: "That's how I won the nomination." And after Beatty suggested that Carter's attendance might reassure guests troubled by the issue of his rather unhip religious beliefs, Carter said: "with a thin smile—that when folks found out he had been to a party given by Warren Beatty, 'I should wipe out the issue.'"

Carter drew fewer laughs two days later at the Legion convention in Seattle. He appeared to invite boos—and he got them. "No, No, No," rumbled through the hall as he told the assembled Legion-



Dole draws blood in Iowa: A small but instructive fight over grain embargoes

naires he would grant a blanket pardon to Vietnam-era draft dodgers—even though he disagreed with their tactics. "Amnesty means that what you did was right," he said. "Pardon means that what you did, right or wrong, is forgiven. So pardon yes, amnesty no." Despite the boos, Carter won praise for forthrightness. He made his moral witness prominently before the TV cameras—and before the party's liberal wing watching at home. And he seemed to have out-media-manipulated Sen. Robert J. Dole, who de-

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YOUNG: GETTING OUT THE VOTE

Twenty years ago, the Rev. Andrew Young took part in his first voter-registration drive among the poor black parishioners of Thomasville, Ga. Later, as an aide to Martin Luther King Jr., he trudged around the shantytown ghettos of other Southern towns on the same mission. Last week, Rep. Andrew Young stood before a crowd of transplanted Southerners in the Los Angeles ghetto of Watts and began yet another new-voter campaign. But this time Young was accompanied by Jimmy Carter—a Presidential candidate he described as a "brother"—and he spoke as the newly ordained chairman of the Democratic Party's \$2 million national voter-registration effort.

The Democrats' attempts to enroll large numbers of blacks and young voters during the last two Presidential elections flopped, partly because of a lack of funds, partly because many of the newly registered did not go to the polls. But Young has organizing skills born in his days with the civil-rights movement; he believes that he can not only register more than a million new voters, but persuade them to actually vote. Young and

his staff will concentrate on door-to-door contact with potential voters in fourteen mostly industrial states. And because Carter seems to have a solid lock on the nation's black vote, Young intends to earmark a large percentage of his budget for black districts. (Young's project received an assist last week when a non-partisan group, the National Coalition on Black Voter Participation, formally opened its "Operation Big Vote" aimed at the nation's estimated 7 million unregistered blacks.)

Subtle: The effort launched by the Democrats last week also demonstrated the easy transition of Young from agitator to political insider. "Instead of marching around the Capitol and trying to influence things, I thought I should walk into the Capitol and get some legislation enacted," he says of his decision to run for congressman from Georgia. He lost on his first attempt, but won the seat in 1972. Young quickly earned a reputation as a respected and persuasive political operator, and his seat on the powerful House Committee gave him what he calls "a lot of subtle influence on every piece of legislation." Young's tacti-

cal sense, which he credits to King, has enabled him to work effectively across ideological and party lines. "His temperament lends itself to working with all kinds of people," observes Rep. Shirley Chisholm. "He is a tremendous mediator and conciliator." He was the only Black Caucus member to vote for confirmation of Gerald Ford as Vice President—and he supported the Nixon pardon.

Young's political pragmatism also led to his once-curious alliance with Jimmy Carter, a candidate from red-neck country he did not even support for governor of Georgia. But once convinced that Carter was sincere about race, Young laid his own credibility on the line, holding firm through the "ethnic purity" crisis (he told Carter to retract his statement) and reassuring doubtful liberals up until the very day of the nomination.

The success of that gamble till now has placed Young in an unusual position—downplaying predictions that he will be the most powerful black man in America if Carter is elected. "I'm not



Young, vote-drive symbol: Influence—but no plans to be 'White House nigger'



—DENNIS A. WILLIAMS with HENRY SACKE in Washington