The Presidential Choice

In this 200th year of American independence, it will be the supreme irony if proportionately fewer eligible voters cast their ballots on Nov. 2 than in any previous Presidential election of the past half-century. If we Americans don't care enough about our own democracy to participate in it, we deserve to lose it—and lose it we will.

Many prospective nonvoters are saying that there is no real choice between the two major Presidential candidates—or that whichever is the victor, it makes no difference to the country. But this is fatuous nonsense. Of course it makes a difference who occupies the most powerful post of leadership in the world's most powerful democracy—even when the contest is between two candidates who fail to excite the electorate and who are unable in three nationally televised debates adequately to articulate their respective philosophies of government or to clarify the political, economic and moral issues that divide them.

No matter how disenchanted one may have become with the negative record and the benign image of a Ford, or how dubious one may be of the undefined positions and the unknown qualities of a Carter, the choice between these men and what they stand for must be made. Every American who can vote owes it to himself and to the country to cast his ballot nine days from today. We will cast ours for Governor Carter.

Not much more than a year ago, the question was: Jimmy Who? Today it is: Jimmy—why? We think there are solid reasons for the independent voter, not bound by partisanship or party loyalty, to choose Jimmy Carter over Gerald Ford.

The most fundamental reason is that—despite Mr. Carter's ambivalence in some areas and his vagueness in others—he and Senator Mondale have demonstrated both in the broad sweep of political philosophy and in the narrow focus of specific detail a sense of direction and of leadership based on a humanitarian, socially oriented, essentially liberal approach to most major questions of domestic and foreign policy. Such an approach appears less developed or altogether lacking in their two opponents.

Of these questions, none is more immediately pressing than the combination of dangerously high unemployment with a still-intolerable rate of inflation. The present Administration's effort to cope with the unhealthy state of the American economy has been not altogether unsuccessful, but generally too little and too late, reflecting in its fiscal and monetary policies ideological constraints by which a more innovative and activist Carter Administration would not be so tightly bound.

Meaningful tax reform, a rational budget policy, a serious effort to tie defense expenditures to the nation's actual needs, an effective employment program—these are all areas in which Governor Carter offers greater promise than President Ford has delivered in performance.

Over the entire range of domestic policy from civil rights and liberties, education, housing, health and energy to environmental and nuclear controls, Mr.

Carter has demonstrated a far keener awareness of the nation's real needs—and far less concern for special and vested interests—than has his opponent, whose short tenure in the Presidential office and previous quarter-century in the House of Representatives have left him with a basically negative record in most or all of these areas. Though Mr. Carter's links with the Democratic Congress are anything but close, as a Democratic President he would be in relatively good position to provide leadership in a program of positive legislative action to supplant government by stalemate, default and veto that the nation has endured for the past two years.

Through his understanding—arrived at late but still ahead of President Ford—of the inextricable link between the fiscal plight of New York and the social and economic health of all the nation's major cities, Governor Carter has already shown greater perception of the urban crisis and its implications than Mr. Ford; and we believe that, if elected, he will be far more helpful.

Mr. Carter has made some egregious errors during the campaign in his occasional excursions into foreign policy. But his broad view of this country's relations with its allies, its potential enemies and with the Third World is refreshingly non-doctrinaire. He clearly realizes that the United States cannot and should not try to impose its moral or political ideas on other countries and must never forget that the most dangerous and least defensible of all foreign policies inevitably springs from the arrogance of power.

The essential difference between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford is that the challenger represents a "new spirit," as he put it in the third debate Friday night, while the incumbent is weighted down by the burden of the past and has little vision of the future. Watergate is well behind us, but Mr. Ford will ever have to carry the onus of his failure to recognize—until almost too late—the moral guilt of his predecessor. This failure was only compounded by his hasty pardon of Mr. Nixon—an ill-considered act for which it is difficult to pardon Mr. Ford.

The very fact that Jimmy Carter, if elected, will be the first President to come from the Deep South since the Civil War suggests the revolutionary nature of the change in American politics during the past few years. He not only represents a new generation; he represents a new set of relationships in the United States. If he is eyed with suspicion because he is so new and so untried, that is only to be expected; but we believe that if he does represent a risk, it is a risk well worth taking.

In his choice of Senator Mondale as his running mate, Governor Carter unmistakably indicated the direction of his political thinking; he picked a man of well-defined progressive philosophy clearly capable of succeeding him in the Presidency. The contrast with Mr. Ford's choice of running mate is too painful to dwell upon. But it must be said that in his selection of the man to succeed him should that be necessary, Mr. Ford has inexcusably put the country at risk.

This is by no means the least persuasive reason to vote for Governor Carter for President of the United States.