

Salvaging the Grand Old Spirit

"Certainly, simple honesty is not too much to demand of men in government. We find it in most. Republicans demand it from everyone—no matter how exalted or protected his position."—Sen. Barry Goldwater, Acceptance Speech, Republican National Convention, 1964.

LOST: In the vasty deep of Watergate-on-the Potomac, sometime during 1972 or early 1973. Spirits answering to the call of Integrity-in-Government, Law-and-Order, Respect-for-the-System, Bias-in-the-Media. Finder please contact George Bush, Chairman, Republican National Committee, or the nearest available Republican sorcerer.

Make no mistake, in this Year of the Elephant, 1973 A.W., we have come to a time of uncertain and shifting political

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imagery, not merely of personalities but of issues and shibboleths as well.

Even as the Party of Abolition was a century ago transformed into something quite different, so do the consequences of Watergate (or should it now more accurately be called Watergate-Ellsberg?) threaten the Grand Old Party with instant imagectomy. For whatever its ultimate outcome in the courts—who was implicated, who is to be exonerated—the political ramifications of this seemingly bottomless affair go to the viability of issues which, in one form or another, have provided the thrust of Republican Party campaign doctrine since 1952.

That was the year, as Chalmers Roberts recently pointed out on these pages, in which the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket swept into office pledged to launch a Great Crusade that would restore public confidence in the executive branch and "clean up the mess in Washington." Since that time, the image of Teapot Dome having been buried under successive Eisenhower land-slides, "integrity-in-government" has been to Republicans what "the party-with-a-heart" is to their Democratic opposition: a shibboleth, a slogan, but more, the dominant ethic-image pro-

jected by the party in its appeal to the electorate.

For most Republicans, that appeal has featured, with varying emphasis:

- *Law-and-Order.* When the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket was elected in 1952, the crime issue related narrowly to dereliction at the highest levels of government. This, however, was an issue quite different from "crime in the streets" as it emerged during the Goldwater campaign of 1964 and was further developed four years later, when the party nominee drew his most sustained applause at Miami Beach with a pledge to give the country a new attorney general. Contemplating the possibility of the opposition's playing back that line alone, Watergate-Ellsberg can be viewed as the supreme political misfortune: being hoist by one's own rhetorical petard. Indeed, the only appropriate analogy, in terms of the Democratic image, would be a revelation that some national administration of the party-with-a-heart underwrote financing for a chain of usurious loan shops in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

- *Respect-for-the-System.* This issue, composed of one part abiding values and one part opposition to "elitist" and/or counter-culture arguments which reject those values, has been developed since 1969 as the appeal best calculated to lead Republicans out of the wilderness of minority party status. In sum, it embraces the folk ethic of that amorphous body of electoral consensus variously labeled the Emerging Republican (1969), Silent (1970), Real (1972) and New (1973) Majority, whose attitudes are reflected in their most sophisticated literary form by Irving Kristol essays, and in their most basic by the bumper sticker: "America: Love It or Leave It." The tactical problem now facing Republicans who rely on this appeal was reflected recently in one of those wordless mini-editorials of electronic journalism; in this case, a tight close-up of an ousted White House aide, focusing full-screen on the American flag Nixon staff members wear prominently on their lapels. Whether incidental camera work or intended irony, the message came through loud-and-clear as an updated interpretation of Doctor Johnson's aphorism about patriotism as a refuge.

- Finally, there is the matter of *Bias-in-the-Media.* Not an issue in any substantive sense, but nonetheless recognized as an article of party faith (at least among conservatives) since the

moment General Eisenhower brought the 1964 convention to its feet with a throwaway line about "sensation-seeking columnists." Until then, public opposition to the press had been identified as a national Democratic issue, e.g. Adlai Stevenson's 1952 Portland, Ore., speech on "The One Party Press." More recently, however, except for the frenetic final stage of the McGovern campaign, most Democrats have found themselves in the position of defending the press against GOP attack. Now, considering the key role played by newsmen in uncovering Watergate-Ellsberg, that attack also is likely to cease, as was indicated by the President's "give me hell" comment and Ron Ziegler's public apology to the White House press corps.

Of these themes, most Republicans probably consider the last-named no great loss, since politicians, regardless of party, prefer trying to use rather than abuse their news outlets. But what of the rest? Can Republicans, post-Watergate-Ellsberg, salvage the party image that has led them to four victories in the last six national elections? Next year's Senate and House races will be a first test of the doctrinal incantation already being heard, on Capitol Hill and at the grassroots: that Watergate-Ellsberg, when all is said and done, was not the product of Republican Party politics, but of "amateurs" and arrogant functionaries operating out of an isolated White House.

To be sure, the spirits are being summoned. But the question Republican hotspurs must ask as the investigative waters thicken is, will they come in 1974 and beyond?