



# Man in the

By Robert Signer

It is a cold day in January, 1963, and a feisty, short man is standing on a bronze star on the state capitol steps in Montgomery, Ala., the same steps where Jefferson Davis was once sworn in as president of the Confederacy.

The man is vowing, "segregation now . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever."

It is September, 1968, and a crowd of 3,000 persons at the airport in Springfield, Ill., is swaying wisp-like with the brisk fall breeze. Their hero is a pugilistic man in baggy pants telling them how he'd win the war in Vietnam.

"Sock it to 'em, George," a teen-age boy yells, raising high a sign proclaiming, "We Love America and Apple Pie."

It is a quiet evening in May, 1972, in the auditorium of Cadillac High School in Cadillac, Mich., and 2,000 persons are cheering their candidate, a forceful speaker who tells them:

"We're tired and fed up to here"—as he motions over his head—"giving foreign aid to a country that spits in our face in the United Nations and wants us to lose the war in Vietnam."

**THE SPEAKER, NEARLY** a decade apart in time but far closer in spirit to a growing audience of followers, is George C. Wallace, governor of Alabama, candidate for President of the United States, and symbol of a virulent kind of restlessness and dissatisfaction running fiercely through whatever it is that makes up the American character.

Wallace, who lies critically injured in a hospital in Silver Spring, Md., after an assassination attempt, is a creature of recurrent strain of American political history with antecedents directly traceable through Huey Long to some of the Populist leaders of the 1890s.

He is an inhabitant of a changing gothic landscape of frustrated aspiration and simplistic solution. In short, he represents the politics of catharsis—a spokesman for millions of Americans whose particular visions of life have become warped by reality and who have turned to him for release.

These are the little Americans, not necessarily the bigots, the same breed who looked to Dr. Francis Townsend and Father Coughlin and the Social Justice propagandists in the 1930s when the bright candles of youth and hope and affluence burned dim.

**GEORGE CORLEY WALLACE**, a poor boy from a farm in rural Barbour County, Ala., is one of these people.

"My life has not been an easy one," he once said. "We never had a silver spoon in our family. I can remember when I was going to the university and I had to sell some old clothes and coat hangers I collected for \$4.50 to pay tuition expenses."

Wallace was born Aug. 25, 1919, the first of four children of George C. Wallace Sr. and his wife, Mozelle. The family was poor and, when his father died in 1937, mortgage hold-

ers foreclosed on the family farm. Mrs. Wallace had to go to work as a Works Progress Administration sewing room supervisor.

Wallace worked at odd jobs all through school, and, earning an early reputation for being scrappy, twice won the state's Golden Glove bantamweight championship. He was also quarterback on his high school football team in Clio, Ala., although he carried only 96 pounds on his 5-foot-7-inch frame.

Wallace set his sights on success early in life. Marshall Frady, author of a recent book on Wallace, tells this story about him:

Wallace's younger brother, Jack, once returned to the house after milking the cows to find George standing around the kitchen waiting for supper to be served.

"How come you don't ever do any of the work around here," Jack asked angrily. "How come I'm always the one supposed to look after the cows for you?"

George's reply, quiet and steady, was:

"Because there ain't no future in that stuff."

**BROKE MOST OF THE TIME** and forced to work at odd jobs, Wallace nevertheless was able to put together six years of part-time study at the University of Alabama Law

School, earning a law degree in 1942 at the age of 23.

He spent a lot of his time in those war days hanging around a downtown 5-and-10 store in Tuscaloosa, where a pretty, 16-year-old girl named Lurleen Burns was working as a clerk.

It was an unromantic kind of courtship. "He ate quite a lot when he came over to our house," Lurleen recalled years later. "Even then, he was talking politics all the time. That's what seemed to be really occupying his mind. He was already talking about running for governor. While we were dating, people wanted to know why he wasn't in the service, and this bothered him. He was nervous about that. It worried him a lot."

They were married on May 22, 1943, and spent their honeymoon in Clayton, just 17 miles up the road from Clio.

"It wasn't much of a honeymoon, I guess," a friend said years later. "George'd go into town every morning with a buddy of his, and when he'd come back to the house for lunch, she'd be at the door waiting. Then, after lunch, he'd go back uptown. He spent most of his honeymoon just hanging around town talking to people. I wouldn't say he was cold exactly; he just wasn't overly affectionate. He wasn't

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Gov. George Wallace's rise rooted  
in addressing himself to little man

# **schoolhouse door**



Gov. Wallace attempts to prevent integration of the University of Alabama in June, 1963.

# Wallace, a man who stood in the school house door

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really happy unless he was talking to the boys and shaking somebody's hand, that's all."

**TALKING TO THE BOYS** and shaking their hands. That was Wallace then; that is Wallace now. But first there was that business about military service.

Wallace had volunteered for pilot training in the Army shortly after his wedding, but he had to drop out of flying school because of spinal meningitis. After he recovered, he entered flight engineers' school and spent much of the war aboard a B-29 bomber, christened Sentimental Journey, in the Pacific.

Mrs. Wallace accompanied George as he moved from Army base to Army base. Once they lived in a converted chicken coop in Alamogordo, N.M., while Wallace was stationed there.

Wallace's political career began shortly after he was discharged from the service, when he got a job in Montgomery as an assistant state attorney general. In 1946, he was elected to the state's House of Representatives, where he had once worked as a page while attending high school.

He served six years in the House until his election as a trial judge in the 3d Circuit in 1952, and it was while he was a circuit judge that he gained some initial national attention by refusing, in 1953, to turn over voter records to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

## The schoolhouse door

The road to national fame — and an issue that was to carry him there — began in a gubernatorial battle in 1958 against John Patterson. Wallace lost, and some of his aides asserted that it was because Patterson's stand for segregation was more militant than Wallace's. Wallace reportedly vowed never to let that happen again.

The next time he ran, in 1962, he won, and it was as a symbol of segregationism in a South that was changing but didn't know it then. The country will not soon forget the image of Wallace standing in the schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama in an unsuccessful attempt to block the admittance of two black students. Wallace had to yield to federalized National Guard troops.

In 1964, Wallace made strong showings in presidential primaries in Wisconsin, Indiana and Maryland, but he withdrew from the race after Barry Goldwater was nominated by the Republican Party on the ground that he didn't want to split the conservative vote.

Then came 1968, and Wallace, running on the American Independent Party ticket, won 45 electoral votes in five Deep South states — Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia and Arkansas.

**HIS CAMPAIGN THEN** was a forerunner of the 1972 campaign, as Wallace showed a marked ability to seize upon the issues that troubled his beloved "little man."

Whether it was Springfield, Ill., or Charleston, W. Va., or Cincinnati, Ohio, or Lexington, Ky., or Columbia, S.C., or Albany, Ga., Wallace got up and gave the same speech. He had no texts, no press releases, no nothing — just the one speech, stored in his head, into which he would drop the name of the city and state he was visiting.

Exaggeration and simplicity were the keynotes of that one speech, and always it sounded something like this:

"We're not overrunning with money, you know. We don't have the Rockefeller Foundation going for us. Just the people."

The issues were economics — "We're going to repeal the tax exemptions of all those big foundations that keep issuin' reports sayin' how you and me ought to be taxed" — free speech — "When I'm elected President, I'm going to ask my attorney general to seek an indictment against every college professor who calls for a Communist victory — and throw them all in jail" — bigotry — "You know who the biggest bigots are? The people who call YOU a bigot, that's who" — foreign policy — "I say, the other two parties been fiddlin' aroun' with foreign policy for 100, 150 years, and look where we are now: Worse off than we've ever been."

And so it went.

## The sounds of '72

And so it goes, with a more sophisticated twist — or was going, until Monday's shooting. Running as a Democrat this time, Wallace ran up 210 electoral votes in four primaries, putting him third behind George S. McGovern and Hubert H. Humphrey and well ahead of Edmund S. Muskie. He finished second in primaries in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Indiana and fourth in Massachusetts.

Wallace was campaigning this time with country music bands — to appeal to the little people — and a new wife. Lurleen, who succeeded him as governor of Alabama, died of cancer in May of 1968, and two years later Wallace married his second wife, Cornelia, a divorced mother of two.

Cornelia, considered by associates and the press as an astute campaigner, is generally credited with making Wallace pay more attention to his clothing. He is now a very



## *Ignoring Secret Service advice*

President Nixon, apparently ignoring the advice of Secret Service men that it is impossible to protect a public figure

in a crowd, wades into a crowd outside the White House Tuesday, shaking hands and talking animatedly. (UPI)

natty dresser, far more sophisticated than in 1968. And he sports longer hair.

The themes of his 1972 campaign had some of the same sounds as 1968, with some careful updating: Let's send a message to Washington, he told his audiences, a message about taxes, busing, welfare cheaters, foreign aid.

"I'm your voice," he would say in one of his favorite stock speeches. "I'm here to speak for you. It's not me they're listening to. It's you."

**A BIG PART OF WALLACE'S APPEAL** has always been tax reform, but in a speech earlier this month in Cadillac, Mich., he went after the subject in a different manner. Instead of criticizing tax loopholes for the "superrich," Wallace called the income tax "the most regressive tax we have the way it is administered. It is designed to destroy the middle class and make it impossible for you to make ends meet."

Partly in an attempt to sidestep the charge of racism, Wallace repeatedly said in this campaign that the major issue is "the remoteness of government from the people."

In one typical misrepresentation, he said there is one bureau in Washington with 106,000 people — and HALF of them spend all their time checking up on the schools in Cadillac.

He was talking about the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, of course, but HEW's activities come nowhere near the picture he painted.

Try as he could to avoid it, the issue of racism dogged Wallace. He said the public believes he is racist because of "distortions" in the media.

"All of you who travel with me know I'm no more a racist than you are," he said recently, pointing a finger at a gaggle of newsmen in front of him. "If you've got it in you, then I've got it in me. If you don't, then I don't. I'll match my religious background with any of you. I'm as good a man as any of you."

It was one of the few times he has lost his temper in public.

**WALLACE IS, UNDOUBTEDLY,** a complex man despite the simplistic tone of his messages. There are many who considered him a dangerous man, not because they believed he might actually gain the Presidency, but because he fueled the subterranean fears of millions of middle-class Americans whose daily contacts with the difficult decisions of urban life provided fertile ground for conflict.

It is this wave of stridency that has not been stilled by any would-be assassin's bullet.