



Bob Adelman

FROGMORE, S. C.—A few years ago in a small South Carolina town where I lived, a man named Gene Kneece announced that he was going to run for the job of superintendent of schools. Although Gene was a nice fellow, he did not have any apparent qualifications for that post. But he went out knocking on doors.

"I'm Gene Kneece," he said, cheerfully and confidently to whoever answered. "I've got six children and I need that school job." That was Gene's campaign and he won with it.

And it now looks possible that Jimmy Carter might make his way to the White House with just about the same political tactics that Gene used. After all, they're tried and true, and they've been developed in a region where everything depended on their success. The South has been surviving on its own rhetoric since 1800. Politics is the South's theater, the main carrier of its folklore, its most glamorous vocation, and its universal avocation.

Out of these years of political combat, three rules have evolved: Never discuss issues. Be confident and act as if you've already won. Show the voters you want the job.

It used to be true in the South that any discussion of issues would lead to the one tabooed issue, to the issue of Southern life, to a discussion of race. It was imperative, therefore, that issues be avoided, sidestepped, dodged, evaded, counterfeited, disguised or converted into code language.

Instead of using issues, the Southern politician, with the help of the white primary, the disfranchisement of the blacks, and of most of the poor whites won his seat by building constellations of "friends and neighbors," as V. O. Key described them in his landmark study, "Southern Politics." That is, the skill in winning was the skill in making every voter believe he was either a friend or a neighbor.

This style of personal politics, developed through nearly two cen-

## Grins And Grits

By George McMillan

tures of campaigning, has produced a breed of candidate willing to go to any extreme to remember your first name, shake hands by the elbow and smile—no matter what happened.

But hasn't the South changed? And isn't Jimmy Carter a symbol of the new South? The historical view helps: The South has proclaimed a "new South" at about the rate of once every decade since Henry Grady proclaimed it at the end of Reconstruction.

It is true that white Southerners are more cosmopolitan, more prosperous, less insular and defensive than they were before the 1964 civil rights laws were enacted. The black movement and its victories freed the white man, too. But the South has not yet gone through that industrialization that has so often been hailed. And its political institutions, its political life, its political style, have not yet altered fundamentally.

What has actually happened in Southern politics since blacks have been allowed to vote freely is not a political revolution.

Most often in the South today it works out that the black man votes for the white politician who will support some local black project—a child-care center, say—while the same politician will vote in the State Legislature or in Congress against almost every measure that would benefit the black community nationally. Senator Strom Thurmond will sponsor a prominent black South Carolina lawyer for the Federal bench and at the same time

vote against every social welfare program that goes to the Senate.

Throughout the South, such concessions are being made by white politicians who are content to make them as long as they can remain the brokers of actual political power.

The political style of Southern politics, of campaigning, has not changed that much. It is still a style in which issues are not discussed in the campaign. It is still a very personal style. It is still a style in which the candidate spends most of his time and energy trying to convince the voters that he is a Good Ol' Boy. It is still a style that reduces the constituency to friends and neighbors who cannot, after their votes are counted, argue that the candidate for whom they used their franchise stands for anything more specific than, say, God.

It was inevitable that some Southern politician would do what Carter is doing today, try the Southern style of politics on the national electorate.

It seems that Carter has found the exact moment when the national electorate is ready for the Southern style, when many of us prefer that the energy crisis, détente, the economy, busing, assassination conspiracies and Watergate be left undiscussed.

Carter is not the man to remind us of these perplexing and often painful problems, certainly not as long as his smile works.

George McMillan is author of a forthcoming biography of James Earl Ray, convicted of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.