A great reporter's intimate portrait of the least known, least understood President of modern times

The Making of the President 1968

by Theodore H. White

In this issue LIFE presents the first of two articles excerpted from Theodore H. White's The Making of the President 1968, to be published by Atheneum later this month. Like his earlier books on the presidential elections of 1960 and 1964 (also excerpted in LIFE), Mr. White's new book is a detailed chronicle of all the campaigns by all the candidates. In these articles, he focuses on the character and extraordinary comeback of Richard M. Nixon.

One is almost forced to begin the story of Richard Nixon's return from disaster to triumph by recalling Dickens' A Christmas Carol. "Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner... Old Marley was as dead as a doornail." For, by the beginning of 1963, Richard M. Nixon was also as dead as a doornail.

He had been wounded by his defeat by John F. Kennedy in 1960, but not mortally so; he had run a respectable campaign, losing by the closest margin in 20th Century American history. The choice before him in the aftermath of that defeat, was the choice of identity he had faced all his life, He could return to California, the home place; or go to New York where offers, far more lucrative than any from California, enticed him to come. He returned to California, though forewarned by friends and aides that, if he did, there would be no escape from public pressure to run for governor in 1962.

The pressure proved indeed insurmountable. Thus the campaign of 1962, an ordeal and humiliation at the polls on which all in the Nixon group now look back as nightmare, was crowned by the unforgettable morning-after at the Beverly Hilton, where, in a tantrum, Nixon dashed down the corridor to blister the assembled press: "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore, because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference." Five days later, taking him at his word, the ABC television network aired its half-hour-long show, "The Political Obituary of Richard M. Nixon," and the former Vice President was dismissed from history.

California and Los Angeles had, by this time, palled on Richard M. Nixon. By early 1963, the itch to be back in the stimulating world of Eastern affairs had become overwhelming. Two old friends, both of them clients of one of the oldest of New York's Establishment law firms, Mudge, Stern, Ballard & Todd, urged Nixon's name on the senior partners, and it was arranged that Nixon would join the firm. There, shortly after his arrival, he signed off from politics in an interview with Roscoe Drummond: "I say categorically that I have no contemplation at all of being the candidate for anything in 1964, 1966, 1968, or 1972. Let's look at the facts. I have no staff. I am not answering any political mail. I am only making an occasional speech, writing an occasional magazine article. I have no political base. Anybody who thinks I could be a candidate for anything in any year is just off his rocker."

Thus, by the spring of 1963, he was installed in the heart of the Eastern Establishment, his office just off Wall Street, his home at the core of the Perfumed Stockade, on the fifth floor of the same apartment block that sheltered his antagonist, Nelson Rockefeller, on the 11th floor. I was to see him occasionally now in New York, by chance. Once, I remember seeing him strolling alone on Fifth Avenue on a cold December day. He had no topcoat, only a light suit jacket, and the habitual frown was gone from his face; he was smiling as if amused by some inner conversation. I was to observe him occasionally...
In New York, Nixon craved culture and thumped the piano Truman-style

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thereafter at parties and receptions, and the fleeting street impression was reinforced: the bearded, brooding man of 1960 had, at least externally, changed: the personality seemed infinitely more relaxed.

Nixon in New York still puzzled me: he had put on weight, which rounded his features—yet they were sharper than ever. The jaw jutted out, the nose was more pronounced, the bushy, thick hair of his earlier campaigns was slowly receding to a widow's peak, its curly wave more conspicuous. The lines on his face, the cheekfolds themselves, were deeper, more unmasked, yet the more mature man seemed more attractive, less harsh than the man of 1960. But as a political reporter I had little interest in Nixon in his early years in New York; and though I tried continuously, out of residual curiosity, to keep my ear tuned to scraps and bits of gossip about him, I had long since packed away my files and clippings on him to a forgotten corner of my cellar.

There seemed, during this period, to be something of a “culture-hunger” about Nixon, difficult to understand if one did not also come from a background of deprivation and earnest self-improvement. Nixon craved music, for one thing—not modern music but the familiar standards, like the works of Beethoven and Bach. Nixon, friends told me, would occasionally play his records turned up full-volume when he worked. And he liked to play the piano in a bar—his favorite, Cottage Cheese, in Brooklyn, and as Garment played the clarinet, Nixon would thump away on the piano.

He had, as he has pointed out himself, time to read between 1963 and 1967—“he had never had it before—and time to go to plays. Before he came to New York his humdrum taste in food was well known—spaghetti and meat sauce being one of his favorites, cottage cheese and catsup being another. Now he could sample the cuisine of the best restaurants of the city: but, all in all, when he came to New York, he was still a tourist in famous places, unsure of standards, sampling what the great world of culture might have to offer.

It was in New York that he stopped being a tourist. “Between 1963 and 1967,” says Nixon’s close friend (now Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare) Robert Finch, “there came a greater change in lifestyle than in all the years I’d known him between 1946 and 1963.”

Perhaps the greatest influence on Nixon at this time was the law firm whose roster of names he now headed. It is one of the top 10 law firms; with his partnership in it, he could finally have a sense of having made it. Ordinary senior partners in the law firm made, variously, upwards of $150,000 a year. Along with the spread-forward royalties of his book, Six Crises, Richard Nixon found that he was making much more than $200,000 a year. He had come to New York a relatively poor man. In New York he found, as many others have found, that with the right connections and a certain knack anyone could make large sums of money—and it turned out that, once one had made it, money was not all that important. Partnership in the law firm somehow released Nixon from that inner hunger and outer pugnacity which had offended so many people in the years between 1946 and 1963.

But release for what? There is in Nixon, privately and publicly, always a sense of striving, always a dogged, persistent, unshakable diligence, an emotional need for “making it” against all odds. But when one arrives, what then? Nixon could not settle only for money. He had tasted national power as Vice President; he had sojourned at the summit, and the vision could not be forgotten.

One cannot say for sure, but it seems clear that for Richard Nixon 1965 was the year in which his appetite for the Presidency was cautiously revived. The Republican party, as yet, had no recognised leaders—Dwight D. Eisenhower, an ailing saint, could no longer campaign; and the support of Barry Goldwater was still the kiss of death for any candidate outside the Deep South. Two governorships, the majority of New York, and several minor local races were all that marked the election calendar of 1965—but all Republican candidates in these races, except for Lindsay in New York, craved party help. Nixon would supply it. Friends provided a fund for travel expenses; and he spoke in dozens of towns, often with as few as 40 or 50 people to hear him, and to almost no attention from the press.

By the following year, 1966, the Vietnam war had begun to ache in every home and on every campus, summer riots had begun to flare, and Lyndon Johnson’s vulnerability was clear. The large men of the Republican party—Rockefeller, Romney, Reagan—were all preoccupied by home-state struggles for their governorships. And thus Nixon was the Republican most available to do the party thing.

The Nixon group of that campaign, “Congress ‘66,” was established...
A 30,000-mile journey from the furniture pages to the front page

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Aided to help him elect Republican congressmen across the nation and roll back the Johnson majorities on the Hill, it became the nucleus of Nixon’s presidential effort. “It wasn’t,” says one member, “a Nixon-for-President group in the beginning, I suppose we all would have said at the beginning, it’s nice—but he can’t be elected. And then gradually it passed over to something else, like—it’s nice—men gradually it passed over to something else, like—it’s nice—but he can’t be elected. And then the night of the election in ‘66, with those telephones calling in from all over the country—we knew we were in business.”

Nixon was to travel some 30,000 miles and visit some 82 congressional districts in this exercise. At no time, however, was his personal staff larger than two—28-year-old Patrick Buchanan, on a year’s leave of absence from the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, and a gifted political public relations officer, William Safire, who had come to devotion to Nixon as early as 1966. Nixon perambulated week after week with scant attention from the national press, barely making, as Safire said, “the furniture pages in the New York Times.”

If there was a turning point, it came almost by accident. At the beginning of November, Johnson, returning from his Asian trip, issued a communiqué on Vietnam. Reading it in his New York office, in the presence of Safire and Buchanan, Nixon decided it required a Republican reply. Swiftly dictated, it was apparently destined, like so many of his other statements that year, to oblivion. But it was a slack afternoon for news, and Safire, on a hunch, inquiring of the New York Times, was told that if the full text were ready by 6 p.m., they might consider publishing it. The next day, the front page of the New York Times ran the full Nixon story—to provoke instant and furious response from a televised Johnson press conference. The President blasted Nixon as “a chronic campaigner” who “never did really recognize what was going on when he had an official position in the government.”

Nixon was, overnight, front-page again. On the following Sunday, just before the election, he was given network time to reply to the President as the Republican national spokesman—and to emerge before his entire party as the architect of the spectacular Republican comeback that was to follow in the Tuesday election.

For Nixon it was a personal triumph. All Tuesday evening he was on the telephone, checking on the fate of his candidates. From California, where he had stumped for Finch, came the happy news that Finch, in his contest for lieutenant governor, was outballoting Reagan by 300,000 votes. From the Midwest, the Rocky Mountain States, the Plains States came further reports of triumph for the candidates for whom Nixon had stumped. “It’s a sweep. I tell you, it’s a sweep,” he was quoted as saying. He received the reports with a growing euphoria, a mounting happiness. By 4 a.m. it was obvious that the Republican party had picked up 47 seats in Congress—seven more than Nixon had predicted—and three in the Senate. When, at about this time, Nixon telephoned a young aide, John Sears, for the last-last reports, Sears remembers Nixon saying, “We’ll kick their toes off in 1968.”

He was running.

All through the spring months of 1966 Richard Nixon moved on a calendar of his own.

Students mobilized in February and March: Kennedy entered; Rockefeller dropped out, then entered again; ambition retrieved itself in Ronald Reagan; the assassinations happened, the first an act of racial barbarism, the second totally incomprehensible; men died by the thousands in Vietnam; riots stained the nation at home. But Nixon persisted, undeviatingly, in the course he had set himself. Indeed, the placid quality of his campaign reflected his reading of the nation’s turmoil of spirit—and his conviction that millions of Americans yearned for quiet.

The situation was clear as early as January: the country was torn, the consensus of Lyndon Johnson had dissolved, the Administration had lost the confidence of the American people, the apparently hopeless war went on. Clearly, the situation called for alternative national leadership. Historically and practically, the alternative had to be a candidate of the Republican party. But the Republican party

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In his early campaign speeches, a strangely familiar echo of J.F.K.

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was also split. How, then, to cap-
ture it? More specifically, how was
Nixon to capture the party without
tearing it apart as Goldwater and
Rockefeller had done in 1964?

Cherishing Nixon as they did, the
Republican leaders cherished
victory more. The object of pol-
itics is to gain power; and in this
year of opportunity they could not
afford to squander the chance on
a man who had not won a victory
on his own since 1950, 18 years be-
fore. Thus, the first tactical prob-
lem of the Nixon camp was to
erase, as he stated it, "the loser's
image." This meant fighting in
open primaries, an outdoor sport,
the first celebration of whose rites
would be in New Hampshire.

It is cold—sleet on the roads,
snow on the hills, fishermen's hats
on the icebound lakes—when Nix-
on arrives in New Hampshire.

New Hampshire is Republican.
Right-wing, reactionary Senator
Stevan Blyford once ran this state
with club, mace and merciless dis-
cipline; since his death in 1961
the Republican party has dissolved
into fragments. The disorganized
Republican leadership is at odds
within its own house, for New
Hamphire Republicans feud as
easily as Massachusetts Democrats.

But Nixon has the weight and pres-
ence. It is visible. The polls show
it. And his campaign is planned
that way: "No baby-kissing, no
back-slapping, no factory gates,"
the candidate has decided; he runs
as President. His opening press
conference is a deft, smooth per-
formance. "I believe," he says, "I
am better qualified to handle the
great problems of the Presidency
than I was in 1960. . . . I rec-
ognize," he continues, "I must
demonstrate to the American peo-
ple that I can win and that I
must be accepted at the chal-
lenge. I have decided that I will
test my ability . . . in the fires of
the primaries and not just in the
smoke-filled rooms of Miami
Beach."

Then, the next day, to greet the
public—2,000 of them—at St. An-
selm's College in Manchester, his
first crowd of the 1968 campaign.
The features of all his future au-
diences are already there: yeadee,
middle-class, neatly dressed peo-
ple, it has the feel of an extended
wedding reception, a family affair.
"Ike and Dick": buttons from pre-
vious campaigns are prominent,
memories of a safer past, there
is nostalgia here, a reservoir of af-
fection for the man, for the party,
for his inheritance from Eisenhow-
er. One circulates, trying to strain
an apt quote from those small-
town people, who are suspicious
of reporters with notebooks. The
search harvests very little except:
"He's strong. . . . that's why I'm
for him," "I like the way he talks. . . .
he sounds strong," "He's got
the experience. . . . he was with
like."

Campaigning through New
Hamphire, Nixon is ruddy,
healthy, husky. He is hitting the
war, recalling how Eisenhower
brought peace in Korea. "End [this]
war and win the peace," he says,
and the young Uns in the crowded
cheer. You notice that people in
the crowd cheer at different punch-
times—the old people clap when
he says spending in Washington
must be cut down, prices must
hold the line, the dollar must be
saved. The thin fringe of blue-col-
tered workingmen who occasionally
show up in his overwhelmingly
most middle-class audiences breaks
into applause only when he talks
of law-and-order and an end to vi-
olence. But at this point law-and-
order is still a minor theme in
Nixon's speech; it will grow later.

This is the first stanza of his cam-
paign, and, fairly but very def-
initely, there is a familiar echo of
1960. One catches it at first with-
out recognition: "I say this is an im-
portant election and this is an im-
portant state. . . . I say we must
got on with the unfinished busi-
ness of America. . . . We did not be-
come great because of what gov-
ernment did for the people . . . ." Sudden-
ly, the phrase makes the
source clear: "This country must
move again; how long will it take
the United States to move?"—and
one is hearing the echo of the
phrases of John F. Kennedy in
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the first celebration of whose rites
would be in New Hampshir.
One crucial meeting in Atlanta that sewed up the Southern leaders

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In New Hampshire, the Nixons made it a family campaign

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now go forward with a Nixon-the-winner, not a Nixon-the-loser.

An episode the night of the Oregon primary seems to me almost perfectly illustrative of the vivid emotions of the Democratic clash in contrast to the cool and placid quality of the Nixon campaign, I had tended with my bags through the lobby and I, following him—in in the Democratic primary to Eugene McCarthy, the first election defeat any Kennedy had suffered anywhere in 30 consecutive primary and election contests dating back to John F. Kennedy's first entry in 1946. Yet, defeated as he was, Kennedy still had the magic—a crowded hotel at the entrance, screamers screamed, middle-aged men, teen-agers, mothers, all alike calling to him, “Don't quit, Bobby!” and “Bobby, we're with you!” as they sought to touch him. With his wife Ethel, the defeated candidate plowed his way into the hotel lobby and I, following him—in fear, as always, of being trampled down by his hordes—was separated from the candidate.

Trying to catch my breath after the showing and jesting, I wandered with my bags through the strange hotel to a half-empty downstairs restaurant called the London Bar and Grill to find a moment of quiet and pull myself together.

There, in a corner, was a familiar face—the Republican victor of the evening. Richard Nixon and his wife, his Oregon campaign manager and his wife, and another couple sat together at a corner table eating their dinner—with no one else even close, or watching, or approaching the group. By that evening Nixon had all but locked up his control of the Republican party and was almost in full possession of the only alternative political choice of the American people. Since the conversation of Nixon and his little group seemed to be neither private nor animated, I approached, was welcomed, and sat down.

Nixon was happy. I questioned him on the returns and, as usual, he knew them and read them with the sensitivity of an old professional. The two great winners of the evening, it seemed to him, were Eugene McCarthy and Kennedy. “I'm going to have to learn more about Eugene McCarthy,” he said. Rockefeller had done poorly, although the write-ins were still being counted. More important to him was Reagan's poor showing; Reagan had made a massive TV effort and defeat had now eliminated him as a viable national candidate to be put forward by the South. Then, with his characteristic quick anticipation, he said, “I'm going on to Atlanta, Teddy. I'm going to wrap up the whole campaign there.”

In Atlanta, Nixon met with the Southern leaders—Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, Senator John Tower of Texas, and other considerable individuals of the Republican party of the South. Since so much has been made of this meeting and of its binding imperatives on the Miami convention as well as on the present course of the Administration, one should note now what the principal figure recalled some months later: the meeting was not presided over by Strom Thurmond but by Peter O'Donnell, Texas' Republican state chairman. At issue were two things: first, the convention voice of Southern delegates at Miami; and second, the philosophy of a Nixon administration.

On civil rights, which was the chief concern of the Southern Republicans, Nixon agreed that the Supreme Court phrase "all deliberate speed" needed reinterpretation; he agreed also that a factor in his thinking about new Supreme Court justices was that liberal reinterpretations had tipped the balance too far against the strict-construction interpreters of the Constitution; and he averred, also, that the compulsory bussing of school students from one district to another solely for the purpose of racial balance was wrong. On schools, he insisted that no federal funds should be withheld from school districts as a penalty for tur
denly in response to a bureaucratic directive which ordained the precise proportion of white to black children.

More specifically, Mr. Nixon noted that Strom Thurmond seemed most interested in national-defense policy; and he gave reassurance to the senator that he, too, believed in strong defense. The Southerners, in general, wanted to be "fit" on decisions, not to be treated like pariahs on the national scene. On this, too, Nixon gave reassurance. No particular veto on selection of a Vice President or of Cabinet members was requested, although Nixon assured the Southerners they would be in on consultations. To their desire that he campaign heavily throughout the South, Nixon could not give entire assurance—Deep South states like Mississippi and Alabama, he felt, were lost; but he would stump the Border South. The Southerners wanted some clearance on federal patronage; they agreed that a new Administration ought, indeed, to include large personalities from the South; and some would have to be Democrats; since the Democrats are still the Establishment in the South. But the Southerners wanted no appointments that would rip the growth of the Southern Republican party; they did not insist on veto, only on consultation.

All in all, Mr. Nixon could please and reassure the Southern chairmen. When he left, his nomination was secure.

Whichever judgment history will make on Richard Nixon must wait (or years, and will rest on his record in the White House; that judgment must concern itself with the drama of government and policy. But already in 1968 one could see that, though there was apparently to be little drama in Richard Nixon's campaign, there was a drama in the man, in his turning-about in himself.

Here was a man who, in 1960, had been attacked as vicious, untrustworthy and unstable. His campaign managers in 1960 had considered their greatest handicap his "image of pugnacity." Now, in 1968, he was being attacked as dull, smooth and programmed; his greatest danger was "the image of complacency." I myself in 1960 had found him banal, his common utterances all too frequently a mixture of pathetic self-pity and petulant dis
temper. I had never found him untrustworthy, questioned his courage, or doubted his intelligence. But there were also years of reporting which could not be forgotten.

Nixon had fought a tooth-and-nail campaign in his first try for Congress in 1946. His behavior reached an even more intense peak of ferocity in his campaign against Helen Gahagan Douglas for the Senate in 1950. In Washington he had, indeed, proven himself as an internationalist and responsible in foreign affairs—but in domestic affairs always a conservative. What bothered me most was his failure to disassociate himself publicly from the animal savagery of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. Nixon's pursuit of the spoor of Alger Hiss had been finally validated by Hiss's conviction for perjury; but Nixon had worn that credit as triumph, not as tragedy, and accepted the cheers of the bloodthirsty indiscriminately when he might have, with his credit for the Hiss case, made surgically clear the real difference between dissent and conspiracy.

As Eisenhower's Vice President he had been the knife, the enraged partisan waging the nation against monolithic Communism, implying over and over that, somehow, reason had run free through the 30 years of Democratic administration, slashing constantly by insinuando at great patriots like Dean Acheson ("Isn't it wonderful," he said shortly after Eisen
derer's election, "to have finally a Secretary of State who's on our side of the table").

But there should be a statute of limitations in politics; and then, just as in 1960, when I came to cherish John F. Kennedy, I had tackled away his early denunciation of Communist conspirators in the China division of the State Department, so I now tried to tack away the records, files and utterances of the Richard Nixon of the 1950s.

The Nixon of 1968 was so different...
Johnson just doesn't listen to anybody. I like to listen'

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ever from the Nixon of a decade earlier that it was important to try to read all over again the quality of his mind. The whole personality required re-exploration. Most important, perhaps, in my re-assessment of Richard Nixon was the genuine devotion he had called forth from men I respected. I had never been able to fathom the call of Nixon on such men. Now, as I tried to follow their thinking and pursued Richard Nixon in person, I began to catch an echo of what stirred them and, to my surprise, found in myself a slow and ever-growing respect for him.

Reporters, said one of his aides, always keep asking what the real Nixon is—like—they forget, he went on, that wherever Nixon sees a reporter, he's all wound up, he's working, he's not the real Nixon. Nixon is like—they forget, he went on, that wherever Nixon sees a reporter, he's all wound up, he's working, he's not the real Nixon.

I remember the remark because, during a series of conversations we had that winter and spring, the first real glimpse I had of the Nixon came quite by accident. I had already made a call on him at his apartment on November 10, 1967, and that conversation, though cordial, had been wary, brisk and businesslike. A few weeks later, however, catching the second section of a shuttle flight from Washington to New York, I had found a cluster of empty seats in the rear lounge of the almost full Constellation. A minute or two later Nixon himself hustled down the aisle. There were only two seats left, one across from me and one beside me, and Nixon, making the best of the unexpected meeting and smiling, waved his aide to the far seat, then sat down beside me, pulling open his black briefcase to work, as he usually does on a plane flight.

In the briefcase were three of his yellow legal pads, but instead of working on them, he showed them to me; page after page had been written on, then scratched out. He must have written 20 openings for this speech—a short one, he said—and he still didn't have it right. He couldn't make a good extemporaneous speech, he said; he had to work on it. I said I suffered from the same weakness, and we began to talk about writing.

He was enormously interested in writing habits: How and at what times of day did I work? Where? From that to a common concern of all writers—the tax incidence on authors, whereby, whatever the returns or however long it might take to write a book, the tax fell all in one year, with little leeway except the standard spread-forward. Nixon was professional now and the professional lawyer's mind was incisive—probing, stabbing, reaching into point after point of the law, the grasp on detail easy and the constitutional background of patent and copyright law clear in his mind.

From that to the more serious problem of writers and politicians—how to get it all down on paper, how to absorb information. What papers did I read? Did I clip and file? Which did I think were the best papers in the country? How many could I read a day?

He led the interrogation from question to question until I brought up a favorite subject of mine—the concept of the mind as a muscular system that reaches out to pull fragments of fact together in a new pattern or new connection of reality. I mentioned the legends about Sir Isaac Newton's genius, his enormous powers of concentration as he worked the lenses of the mind, and with that Nixon pinned me. He wanted to hear more about Newton, all about Newton. I mentioned John Maynard Keynes's famous tercentenary essay at Cambridge on Newton's genius, and Nixon signaled his aide to make a note of the essay, he must read it himself.

We must have talked of Isaac Newton for a full 10 minutes of the short trip and then, with that sensitivity I came to recognize, he withdrew the pressure of his questioning and began to ramble anecdotally and analytically. He was fascinated by the way things worked. A stewardess came down the aisle to offer us coffee and he must have heard about the marvel of their training, how airplanes could take off and land, girls, put them through several weeks' training and make them exquisitely competent technicians. He must have heard of well-modulated voices; it was wonderful what you could do with almost anybody with modern training methods. Then to a favorite anecdote of his about a long plane ride with Harry Bridges of the longshoremen's union in an old Boeing Stratoliner; then, after we land ed and were driving into New York, with more privacy, he was talking politics—clear, detached, lucid summaries of the problems of all of the candidates: Of Bobby Kennedy's candidacy—the trap Bobby was in as a Democratic candidate locked in under a sitting Democratic President; he couldn't see how Bobby would work his way out of that one. Of Romney's candidacy—Romney's strength lay in domestic affairs, not foreign affairs; he should have dodged Vietnam and stuck to domestic themes in his campaign. Of polls—he believed in issue-salivating polls, they were useless; personal-stand ing polls, he felt, were a waste of money—if you're ahead, don't look behind; if you're behind, it only discourages you.

And then, as he drove me home, he was pleased that he had, in his few short years in New York, found an exit from the East River Drive that got one to midtown minutes quicker and with less traffic than the better-known exit I had been using for 15 years.

It was a new view of the Nixon personality—in which the trait upstairs was a voracious, almost insatiable curiosity, a hunger to know, to learn, to find out how things work, to understand and explore detail, "One of the troubles with Johnson," he said to me much later, "is that Johnson just doesn't listen to anybody. When you go in to see him, he does all the talking from the moment you get in; he doesn't ask questions. I like to listen."

I had another, very different glimpse when I visited him in New York early in the afternoon of March 12, the day of the New Hampshire primary. I found him in his nervous mood—legs crossing and uncrossing, hastening to light the guest's cigar, his sentences tumbling. It was as if the first text at the polls in 1968, and he was undeniably unsettled, but soon the unsettled mood passed and he was Nixon the anecdotalist and, again, thoughtful. He had taken a beating in the press this week for not stating a Vietnam policy, but it could only bind his hands later if he were elected; and it might undermine whatever negotiations Johnson was trying to bring off at this very moment. He said that if he were elected President, the very first thing he'd do would be to get in touch with Red China. There had to be an understanding with Red China. In 10 or 15 years it would be impossible to run the world if Red China weren't part of it. It was at this passage in our acquaintance that I came to believe one could respect the man. I had asked him why he was running for President, and he could not answer, as no other major presidential candidate has ever been able to answer. He had all the money he needed now, and he lived in this—a wave of the hand—fine apartment. But it didn't excite him. He didn't need that much money. He supposed it was just because it was in his blood; he liked politics.

One came to Miami, a shimmering city of unreality, to watch the Republicans choose their candidate; and in Miami, one found the closest approach to reality at Nixon headquarters—200 rooms in the Hilton Plaza Hotel humming with the soft purr of people who knew their business and had been preparing for it for a full year. From the command post in the cleared-out solarium rooms one had an instant overview of what a year's effort had created—and what Nelson Rockefeller's hasty three-month effort and Ronald Reagan's last-minute charge were trying to overtake.

The first Nixon campaign expedition had arrived in Miami to survey the scene eight months earlier, in December. Experts had equipped the headquarters with radios and telephones; web upon web of floor communications and interlinks, cross-channels and direct lines radiated and meshed both at the command wagon at the Convention Hall and here in a 72-line switchboard outside the
In Miami, a convention suffocated under a mattress of boredom

Continued

solarium. Within the solarium, behind a dais, a huge blackboard ran across an entire wall, marked state by state, and day by day from Aug. 1 to Aug. 8. In front of the dais, where convention commander Richard Kleindienst would sit with his nine regional directors and staff, were seats for all 50 of the state captains; and every day, in the morning and afternoon, closed sessions, each state chairman would report his delegate totals. All in all, though the precise totals of the Nixon boards were kept secret, they apparently held over 670 votes—a slim majority in a certain sense.

Boredom served their purposes. For Nixonians as had stirred the Goldwater crusaders of 1964, indeed, passion was the very emotion they sought to avoid—passion had marred the party in 1964, passion raged the nation in 1968. The entire Nixon campaign, through the primaries and down to the election itself, hung on this thought—that the nation had had its fill of turbulence, bloodshed, killing, violence and adventure. It was impossible to make glamorous or romantic the figures involved; but it was impossible not to respect what they had done as an exercise in politics—they had caught the mood of their party accurately, frozen the mood in the delegate count, and now stood watch over the convention to make sure that the hushed volcanoes of 1964 did not erupt once more.

T hree miles south of Nixon headquarters lay the great Convention Hall itself. There tedium gripped the delegates from the clack of the opening gavel. It was not that the Nixon staff had planned the boredom that lay on the convention like a mattress. On the contrary, they wished desperately that the nation would see their hero as a great romantic leader, filling it to new levels of calm, common sense and achievement. But the boredom served their purposes. For them to attack either Rockefeller or Reagan, even to counterattack the Rockefeller or Reagan assault, would be to admit there was a fight and perhaps cause delegates to waver. We have said that the Nixon staff men, a country on the verge of a nervous breakdown; we don't want to add to it. Political gamemanship urged them to turn to the public with placid, optimistic faces; every newspaper poll, every public delegate count gave them a commanding lead. They did not want to disturb the impression.

Thus the Rockefeller and Reagan candidacies expired at Miami Beach. They flailed and tugged and tore at the mattress. It would not move. Rockefeller and Reagan were not so much destroyed as suffocated at Miami.

A candidate arrives at a convention almost certain of whom he seeks as his vice presidential runningmate: it will be the first important decision he makes in national leadership. And then, in the excitement of the convention, as the jagged realities of politics make themselves felt in the pull-and-shove of contending forces, his pre-planning comes unstuck.

Choice had been going on in Nixon's mind for many weeks before the convention. His staff had sorted out the same dozen well-known names into groupings—the "liberals," the "conservatives," and the political "eunuchs." Nixon had, in his usual way, tested his thinking on all his close associates. He had quizzed them over and over again on their preferences: he had floated Spiro Agnew's name several times in such discussions—but staff enthusiasm for Agnew was as close to zero as it was reasonably insurable. Nixon had been under pressure from the congressional wing of the Republican party for weeks to choose John Lindsay, mayor of New York, indeed. Congressman Bob Wilson of San Diego had polled House Republicans for Nixon and found Lindsay a 3-to-1 choice among his former colleagues. Yet Nixon himself preferred, above all others, Robert Finch of California. Finch was to him a younger brother, closer, more trusted, conspicuously more able and more visionary than any other man he had known over the years. He had telephoned Finch with a hard offer several weeks before the convention. But Finch felt he simply was not yet ready to carry, as he put it, "the other end of the stick" in a campaign so important as the Presidency. Finch suggested scholar John Gardner, former HEW Secretary—a man whose intellectual credentials would lift the ticket entirely out of ordinary political dimensions. Nixon loved with the idea of adding such a name to the ticket, and now tentatively substituted that of Franklin Murphy, former chancellor of UCLA, as his preference in the world of thinkers. All these,
First choice for Vice President was
Robert Finch—but Finch said no

Continued:
and other conspicuous possibilities,
revolved around and around in
Nixon's reflections for weeks; but
the private polls he secretly com-
missioned to test the names were
of little help; none could add or
detract more than a point or two
from the test percentages resulting
when Nixon's name was offered
alone. And Agnew's name was not
even on the polling list.

But candidates, being human,
find particular brilliance in men
who discover their own hidden vir-
tues. Thus on nominating night in
Miami, Nixon, watching TV in his
hotel room, thought Agnew's
speech nominating him was the
best, and he was enormously im-
pressed by the man with the
square-cut jaw, the athletic frame,
the commanding presence on the
screen. He had met Agnew only
four months before; for the first
time, had seen him only three or
four times since, but he felt Ag-
new had "authority," was "solid."
Now he questioned all in the room
his personal staff—and they, like
their chief, had enjoyed Agnew's
speech immensely. At about 11,
Nixon went for a half-hour drive
around Miami. Briefly, he told two
pool reporters that he wanted as
his Vice President a man he could
trust, who would work with him
for four years, and who understood
the cities. He, Nixon, could han-
dle foreign affairs.

Then it was time to choose a
Vice President. Midway through
the presidential balloting, floor
pages had begun to deliver notes
to selected Republican dignitaries
at the convention. Now, from the
jostle of the convention, the Re-
publican leaders were making their
way to their new maximum leader
for the ritual of conferring on the
ticker's running-mate.

While he waited for the floor
leaders to arrive, Nixon took a
first sampling of opinion from the
24 men of his operational staff in
the solarium. There were few new
vice presidential names to be add-
ed to the ones so long and so
often discussed. There were the
liberals—Lindsay, Percy, Hatfield.
There were the conservatives
—Reagan, above all others; then
John Tower and George Bush of
Texas, Howard Baker of Tennessee.
And, finally, the political exarchs:
Governor John Volpe of Massa-
chusetts and Agnew. The confer-
cence was not an elimination pro-
cess—the 45-minute meeting was
so short, the number of people too
many. But Volpe and Agnew sur-
rendered the discussion well.
The staff meeting broke up as
Nixon took the congratulatory tele-
phone call from Hubert Humsby
and then he convened with the
leaders who had come from the
convention to his gold-and-white-
brocaded penthouse suite. It was
a jovial meeting, as the leaders
trusted themselves to well-earned
bourbon and Scotch and Nixon
considered their advice. Rhodes of
Ohio and Brownell of New York
were for Lindsay; but the others
at the gathering were overwhelm-
ingly conservative. Barry Goldwater
declared he could under no cir-
cumstances accept Lindsay; Thur-
mond would not have Lindsay;
neither would the lesser conser-
vatives, Lindsay was out.

Ronald Reagan—the other
"glamor boy," in Nixon's private
phrase—was also out. Several
Northerners observed that the
North and the industrial states
could not accept Ronald Reagan
(Nixon Thurmond's favorite) any
more than the South could accept
Lindsay. Robert Finch observed
that Reagan simply would not ac-
cept the offer. The Reverend Billy
Graham observed that whoever it
was, it should be a man of high
morals.
The long night meeting of wea-
ry men got nowhere. There was
something decisive to be said
against everyone—except Agnew
and Volpe. Between 4 and 5 in
the morning, the meeting broke
up in indecision, all having wait-
ed for Nixon's decision, while he
waited on their advice.
At 6:30 a.m., Nixon went to
bed. He rose at 8:30 to descend
to the Jackie-of-Hearts Room (so
turned off Miami's favorite adopt-
ed son, Jackie Gleason). Nixon had
promised he would announce the
name of the new Republican vice
presidential candidate at about 11
in the morning, but he was no near-
er decision than ever. The 9 o'clock
session in the Jackie-of-Hearts
Room was, in effect, a rump ses-
sion of 11 elders who had not
been able to make the all-night ses-
ion in the penthouse suite. Rel-
atively rested and refreshed, these
gentlemen gave one another a hard
time, beginning all over again

Now you can get ice and cold water without raiding the icebox...

Push the cradle marked "Ice" and cubes drop
into your glass. You can even fill a whole ice
cube in a refrigerator only 35"
wide and 66.  high. Plus some other surp-
ses for you.

Like a convertible seven-day meat keeper
that keeps unrefrigerated meat fresh and ready
to cook for an entire week. Or just a flip of a
lever and you can use it for more vegetab-
storage. Slide-out, tempered-glass shelves are
easy to clean and spills don't drip through.

And there's a big storage bin that keeps a
lot of cool in a refrigerator only 353.e
for you.

See the icebox you don't have to raid
for ice and a cold drink. The new Americana,
just one model in our 1965 lineup. Go where
GE is sold and see them all.

You'll add more service on a GE refrigera-
tor, but it's nice to know we're nearby.
with the same list of names that Nixon had heard chewed over twice before.

Again the record turned, the same tune was heard, and the needle stuck: the Southerners in the group absolutely refused to consider Lindsay—or Percy, or Romney, or Hartfield. The Northerners, who wanted Lindsay, absolutely refused to consider Reagan or Tower. The meeting took on the quality of a nominating committee at a boys' club. Wilson of California, having given up on Lindsay, suggested Michigan's Congressman Gerald Ford—because Ford was in the room. Senator Everett Dirksen suggested Howard Baker of Tennessee—his son-in-law. Senator George Murphy suddenly, out of nowhere, suggested Robert Finch again—because Finch was in the room.

Nixon finally withdrew. Summoning his inner circle together—Finch; Tower; H. R. Haldeman, the candidate's personal chief of staff; John Mitchell, his campaign manager; Robert Ellsworth, his national political director; and Rogers Morton, a key adviser—he retreated to the penthouse suite again, where a dozen 7-Up's, a dozen Coca-Colas and two buckets of ice were quickly sent.

The final meeting is the most obscure of the four that were held on the road to selection. By now all names had been eliminated by the crossfire at the previous meetings except those of Agnew and Volpe—plus Robert Finch. Finch left the room when they discussed his name. A few minutes later Nixon emerged to give the message to Finch—that the group wanted him, that he himself wanted to have him.

Finch's instant thinking is unavailable; friends describe him as appalled. The world waited for Nixon's decision. All this should have been settled hours ago. The choice of his name, Finch now said, would smack of nepotism. Finch felt he could be a better friend and adviser than a running-mate to the old companion who now offered him partnership. The upshot: Finch refused.

When the final meeting resumed after its brief interruption, there were only two contenders left—Agnew and Volpe. Of the two, Agnew was the more impressive. And at 12:31 Richard Nixon decided on the most important political appointment in America: Spiro T. Agnew for Vice President.

As the convention ends, the Republican team is ready for battle...

...but when you do, what an icebox to raid.

Next Week: Part 2

The Cautionous Victory

How a piece of international intrigue left Nixon at the mercy of Humphrey’s good will.