

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 inescapable. 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, talking 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.

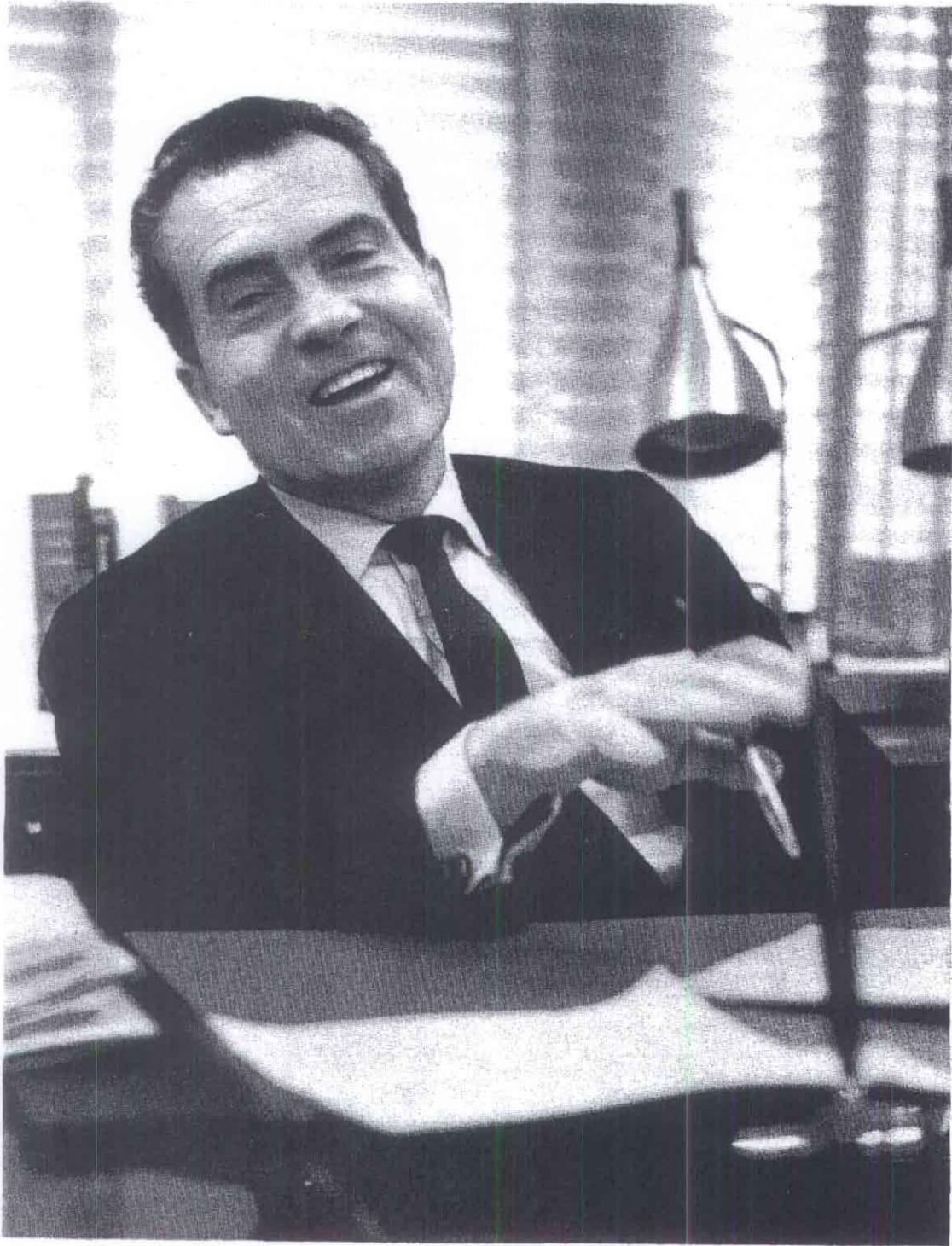
California and Los Angeles had, by this time, palled on Richard M. Nixon. By early 1963, the itch to be back in the stimulating world of Eastern affairs had become overwhelming. Two old friends, both of them clients of one of the oldest of New York's Establishment law firms, Mudge, Stern, Baldwin & Todd, 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

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1964: Relaxed and cheerful, Nixon seemed content to practice law with the New York firm of Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie, Alexander and Mitchell. Politics were behind him, he said soon after joining the firm. "Anybody who thinks I could be a candidate for anything in any year is just off his rocker."

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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 bitter, 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 furrowed; 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-restaurant, fraternity-hall Harry Truman style. Occasionally, in fact, Nixon would go to the home of a young lawyer friend, Leonard Garment, 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 humor 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 life-style 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 recognized leaders—Dwight D. Eisenhower, an aging and 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 mayoralty 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 estab-

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At his famous press conference on November 7, 1962, the morning after losing the California gubernatorial election, Nixon blamed reporters for all his troubles.

A 30,000-mile journey from the furniture pages to the front page

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lished 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'd be nice—but he can't be elected. And then gradually it passed over to something else, like—it's nice working together, maybe he can be elected. And then the night of the election in '66, with those telephone calls coming 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 1960. 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-time returns, Sears remembers Nixon

saying, "We'll kick their toes off in 1968."

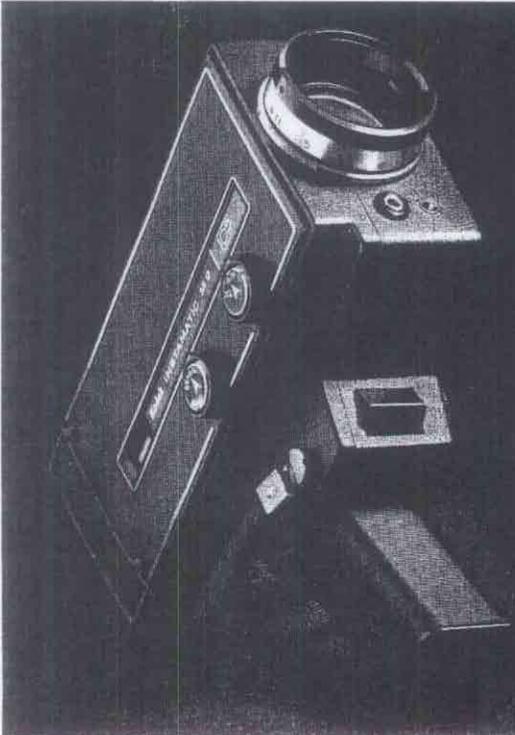
He was running.

All through the spring months of 1968 Richard Nixon moved on a calendar of his own.

Students mobilized in February and March; Romney withdrew; Kennedy entered; Rockefeller dropped out, then entered again; ambition refreshed 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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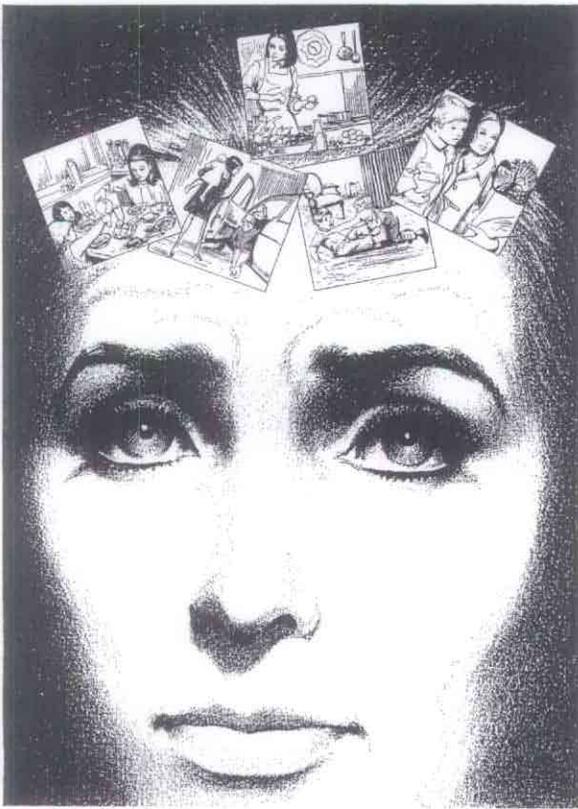
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In his early campaign speeches, a strangely familiar echo of J.F.K.

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was also split. How, then, to capture 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 politics 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 before. Thus, the first tactical problem 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 huts on the icebound lakes—when Nixon arrives in New Hampshire.

New Hampshire is Republican. Right-wing, reactionary Senator Styles Bridges once ran this state with club, mace and merciless discipline; 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 Hampshire Republicans feud as easily as Massachusetts Democrats. Yet Nixon has the weight and presence. 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 performance. "I believe," he says, "I am better qualified to handle the great problems of the Presidency than I was in 1960. . . . I recognize," he continues, "I must demonstrate to the American people . . . that I can win and that I am prepared to meet that challenge. 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. Anselm's College in Manchester, his first crowd of the 1968 campaign. The features of all his future audiences are already there: sedate, middle-class, neatly dressed people. It has the feel of an extended wedding reception, a family affair. "Ike and Dick" buttons from previous campaigns are prominent, mementoes of a safer past; there is nostalgia here, a reservoir of affection for the man, for the party, for his inheritance from Eisenhow-

er. One circulates, trying to strain an apt quote from these 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 Ike."

Campaigning through New Hampshire, 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 youngsters in the crowd cheer. You notice that people in the crowd cheer at different punch lines—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-collared workmen who occasionally show up in his overwhelmingly neat middle-class audiences breaks into applause only when he talks of law-and-order and an end to violence. 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 campaign, and, faintly but very definitely, there is a familiar echo of 1960. One catches it at first without recognition: "I say this is an important election and this is an important state. . . . I say we must get on with the unfinished business of America. . . . We did not become great because of what government did for the people. . . ." Suddenly, 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 1960, the rub-off of memory deep somewhere in his defeated rival. The mark of John F. Kennedy was seared into Richard M. Nixon in 1960; it continues to surface even now, as he runs for President in 1968.

Then it is over in New Hampshire: a clear, smashing victory. Nixon receives 80,667 votes, more than any candidate in any presidential primary in that state's history. His margin over his write-in opponent, Nelson Rockefeller, is seven to one. In the Democratic primary he receives four times as many write-ins as Robert F. Kennedy. Nixon's total is larger than that of all other Democratic, Republican and write-in candidates put together.

With such superlatives as these, the Nixon organization is in business; the delegate round-up can

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In New Hampshire, the Nixons made it a family campaign

One crucial meeting in Atlanta that sewed up the Southern leaders

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-interpretationists 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 would be given to a school district which practiced clear segregation; but, on the other hand, he agreed that no federal funds should be withheld from school districts as a penalty for tardiness 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 "in" 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 nip 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.

Whatever judgment history will make on Richard Nixon must wait for 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 distemper. 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-fang 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 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 warning the nation against monolithic Communism, implying over and over that, somehow, treason had run free through the 20 years of Democratic administration, slashing constantly by innuendo at great patriots like Dean Acheson ("Isn't it wonderful," he said shortly after Eisenhower'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 thus, just as in 1960, when I came to cherish John F. Kennedy, I had tucked away his early denunciation of Communist conspirators in the China division of the State Department, so I now tried to tuck away the records, files and utterances of the Richard Nixon of the 1950s.

The Nixon of 1968 was so dif-

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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 been traveling in California with Robert F. Kennedy earlier that day, and we arrived back at the Benson Hotel in Portland at about 10:30 p.m. By that time the TV networks had told Oregon and the nation that Kennedy had lost his race 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 crowd milled at the hotel 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 shoving and jostling, 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 pos-

session 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 himself and McCarthy. ("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 characteristically 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 votes 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

'Johnson just doesn't listen to anybody. I like to listen'

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ferent 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 whenever 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 man 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 bustled 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 later 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 mused about the marvel of their training, how airlines could take untrained girls, put them through several weeks' training and make them exquisitely competent technicians, efficient hostesses with 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 landed 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 had been ill-advised; 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-analysis polls, they were useful; personal-standing 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 uppermost 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 to be the first test at the polls in 1968, and he was understandably 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 he didn't think he ought to state a Vietnam policy; 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 try 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 communication 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

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In April 1968, taking his campaign into the Midwest, Nixon went aloft to greet a crowd of 700 at the Aberdeen, South Dakota airport.

In Miami, a convention suffocated under a mattress of boredom

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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 but a certain one.

Crisp, businesslike, clean-shirted, neatly barbered, Nixon lieutenants when they gathered looked like a meeting of a junior chamber of commerce. No such passion animated Nixonians as had stirred the Goldwater crusaders of 1964. Indeed, passion was the very emotion they sought to avoid—passion had ruined the party in 1964, passion ravaged 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.

Three 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 wistfully that the nation would see their hero as a great romantic leader, lifting 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 one of the Nixon staff men, a country on the verge of a nervous breakdown; we don't want to add to it. Political gamesmanship urged them to turn to the public with placid, op-

timistic 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.

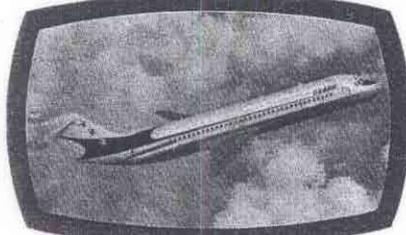
A candidate arrives at a convention almost certain of whom he seeks as his vice presidential running-mate; it will be the first important decision he makes in national leadership. And then, in the excitement of the convention, as the jagged realities of politics make themselves felt in the pull-and-shove 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 queried 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 was reasonably measurable. 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 toyed with the idea of adding such a name to the ticket, then tentatively substituted that of Franklin Murphy, former chancellor of UCLA, as his preference in the world of thinkers. All these,

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First choice for Vice President was Robert Finch—but Finch said no

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and other conspicuous possibilities, revolved around and around in Nixon's reflections for weeks; but the private polls he secretly commissioned 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 virtues. 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 impressed by the man with the square-cut jaw, the athletic frame, the command 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 Agnew 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 handle 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 Republican leaders were making their way to their new maximum leader for the ritual of conferring on the ticket'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 added 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 eunuchs: Governor John Volpe of Massachusetts and Agnew. The conference was not an elimination process—the 45-minute meeting was too short, the number of people too many. But Volpe and Agnew survived the discussion well.

The staff meeting broke up as Nixon took the congratulatory telephone call from Hubert Humphrey, 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 treated 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 overwhelmingly conservative. Barry Goldwater declared he could under no circumstances accept Lindsay; Thurmond would not have Lindsay; neither would the lesser conservatives. 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 (Strom Thurmond's favorite) any more than the South could accept Lindsay. Robert Finch observed that Reagan simply would not accept the offer. The Reverend Billy Graham observed that whoever it was, it should be a man of high morals.

The long night meeting of weary 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 waited 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 named for Miami's favorite adopted 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 nearer decision than ever. The 9 o'clock session in the Jackie-of-Hearts Room was, in effect, a rump session of 11 elders who had not been able to make the all-night session in the penthouse suite. Relatively rested and refreshed, these gentlemen gave one another a hard time, beginning all over again

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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 Hatfield. 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, whither a dozen 7-Ups, 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 12:30 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

NEXT WEEK: PART 2

THE CAUTIOUS VICTORY

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

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