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Teddy Kennedy; Draft Dodger



Arthur Hoppe

EDWARD M. (TEDDY) KENNEDY, kicking and screaming, was dragged up the steps of the Capitol today and inaugurated the 39th President of The United States.

For more than two years, Mr. Kennedy had waged a hard-fought, grueling campaign against his nomination and election — which ended in a resounding personal defeat when he swept 49 states (all but Massachusetts) last November.

The dramatic high point came at the bitterly-divided 1976 Democratic Convention in Chicago. The delegates were bitterly divided over whether they loathed George Wallace more than they scorned Humphrey, Muskie, Jackson and the other tired old politicians — all of whom had been badly battered in the primaries.

Finally, the chant went up, "Draft Kennedy! Draft Kennedy!"

Mr. Kennedy responded by sitting in an aisle, folding his arms and shouting defiantly, "Hell, no! Won't go!"

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BUT THE DEMOCRATIC power brokers, meeting in a smoke-filled room at the Blackstone hotel, saw no alternative. They sent Mr. Kennedy a letter which began: "From the Democratic Party of The United States, Greetings."

Once drafted, Mr. Kennedy vigorously campaigned against his election across the country. At 15 whistle stops a day, he delivered his standard speech, opening with a detailed account of his misbehavior at Chappaquiddick, and concluding, "Would you want a man like that as your President?"

The experts unanimously agreed that his drive and determination would pay off with his overwhelming defeat in November. But an odd thing happened.

Independents who listened to him would nod, look at each other and make some remark such as, "Well, he's honest enough to admit his mistakes. How long has it been since we had a President like that?" Or: "At least he isn't power mad."

Also unreckoned was the hidden backlash vote. "So he doesn't want to be President, eh?" the voters who hated Kennedy would say, rubbing their hands. "Well, we'll fix his little red wagon!"

Coupled with this, was the hidden backlash-backlash vote composed of millions of people who supported Mr. Kennedy simply because they couldn't abide the people who despised him.

As these three categories included virtually every voter in the nation, Mr. Kennedy won in a landslide in November despite desperate, last-minute Republican charges that he was "mud-slinging" — against himself.

"The people have spoken," said a gloomy Mr. Kennedy on election night, "the loudmouths."

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SO IT WAS that the most reluctant candidate in American political history was sworn in on the Capitol steps here today. He then delivered the briefest Inaugural Address in American political history.

"Well," he said, turning to the microphones and suddenly beaming, "it worked!"