

Mr. Nixon Will Stump the World



Arthur Hoppe

AT THE beginning of the 1972 presidential campaign, Mr. Nixon appeared to be in trouble — plagued by the war in Vietnam along with unemployment, inflation and a host of other ills at home.

But those ready to write Mr. Nixon off sadly underestimated his brilliance in evolving campaign strategies to fit the situation.

While his opponents were grimly slog-ging through the snows of New Hampshire, shaking a hand here and a hand there, Mr. Nixon's unerring political instinct took him directly to where the votes were — Peking.

The contrast between the two techniques was particularly startling on television. There'd be a 30-second shot of one or another of his bundled-up, frosty-nosed opponents grumbling about this or that. Then there'd be 25 minutes of a relaxed and smiling Nixon posing confidently before a Hangchow lake, a Ming Tomb or a Great Wall.

And while the voters didn't learn much about the issues, they learned a lot about lakes, tombs and walls. It was educational, entertaining and Mr. Nixon, needless to say, won the New Hampshire primary in a landslide.

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NOR WAS the lesson lost on Mr. Nixon. As soon as he returned home and analyzed the results, he announced he would fly to Russia on May 22 — which just happened to be the day before the critical Oregon primary.

A week later, the White House happily reported that the President would visit Canada on April 13. And while Canada was perhaps not as important as China and Russia, neither were the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania primaries which would be next on the list.

And so it went. By June, as his harried opponents were scurrying all over California in search of votes, Mr. Nixon was quietly campaigning in Jogjakarta. His words,

"I have always liked to foxtrot," while being entertained by a group of topless Balinese dancing girls, received the highest television rating of any Presidential speech in history.

At the GOP Convention in August, a confident President pledged in his acceptance speech: "I shall campaign in all 50 countries!" And he immediately flew off to Pharsala, Philippi, Phoenicia and other photogenic spots to win votes.

Meanwhile, the Democrats had nominated Senator Kennedy, who also had scrupulously avoided appearing in the primaries and who also had thus scrupulously avoided boring or alienating the vast television audience.

But Mr. Kennedy, through appalling poor planning, insisted on campaigning in places like Philadelphia, Phoenix and Phleger's Phalls, Iowa, not to mention hundreds of other places nobody cared to look at.

By November, the issue was hardly in doubt. Indeed Mr. Nixon was already planning to telecast his election night victory speech directly from Kathmandu, where he was waging a last-minute drive to get out the GOP vote.

The turning point came when Mr. Kennedy, out of sheer desperation, delivered his now-historic address: "If elected," he promised, "I shall go around the world for four years!"

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THE CONCEPT of a handsome President bringing educational, entertaining television viewing from the glamor spots of the globe proved irresistible. It was Kennedy in a shoo-in. Nor, as good as his word, was he ever seen in Washington again.

Not once in four years did television viewers have their favorite programs pre-empted by a grim President nattering about the nerve-racking issues of the day. How happy they were! It's a wonder no one thought of it sooner.