

OCT 15 1972

NYTimes

How Nixon Took Atlanta

By JAMES RESTON

ATLANTA, Oct. 12—President Nixon didn't visit Atlanta this past week, he captured it and turned it into a stage setting for national television.

His rally here was a masterpiece of political organization and propaganda. The advance men had done their work well. School was out. Peachtree Street was jammed with the lunchtime crowd. There were high school bands by the dozen and Dixie-land jazz by hairy young men in straw boaters and red-and-white candy-stripe jackets, and the cops and politicians said there were 750,000 people along the President's route, which was quite a mob even if you make allowances for the weakness of political arithmetic.

But the President didn't address the people. That is old-fashioned stuff. He spoke to a meeting of Republican party leaders from the South and piped his remarks down to the reporters in the basement.

For this was a modern political spectacular aimed primarily not at the people of Atlanta, who were bit actors in the production, but at the party workers and the evening television shows, and it was wonderfully effective.

Are the American people apathetic about this campaign? Well, they can be made to look enthusiastic. The pictures on your television screen told the story, or did they? Tons of colored paper floated down on the President and the vast crowd in glorious sun-

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shine, but this didn't come from adoring Republicans tearing up The Atlanta Journal and tossing it out of the skyscraper windows.

It came mainly from giant machines with spouts like sewer pipes that blew literally tons of shredded paper off the tops of the buildings in Peachtree Street and almost drowned the candidate and his lady when they stopped at the prearranged spot between the Lane Bryant Building and the Regency Hyatt House.

So what? Anything wrong with this? Nothing at all. The contrivances of politics are ageless and endless. The only point is that political deception is now being increasingly mechanized by the computer and the television camera, to which, lately, have been added the shredder and the mechanical blower, and it won't hurt you if you don't believe everything you see, and don't inhale.

The trouble is that these modern political techniques are being used in more devilish ways, not to spread the truth but to suppress it, not to strengthen the democratic process but to distort it, not to inform the people on the basic questions of the election, but to use the people as actors in a play.

It is not only that the arts of publicity and advertising are being used in politics—they always have been—but that the blacker arts of espionage and sabotage are now being employed to confuse the people and harass and vilify the opposition.

This used to be common in the gutter politics of the Democratic big city machines. The new thing now is that it is being organized and mechanized by men in the service of the President of the United States, and turned into a form of political and psychological warfare.

To see how the level of political morals is declining, all you have to do is go back to Richard Nixon's 1952 "Checkers" speech about his so-called "secret fund." "I have a theory," he said then, "that the best and only answer to a smear or to an honest misunderstanding of the facts is to tell the truth. . . . I am sure that you have read the charge that I, Senator Nixon, took \$18,000 from a group of my supporters. Now was that wrong?"

He emphasized that this was a moral and not a legal question. "Because," he said, "it isn't a question of whether it was legal or illegal. That isn't enough. The question is, was it morally wrong?"

But now, there are not only charges but evidence of vast sums of hundreds of thousands of secret funds being passed through Mexico to the Republican National Committee, agents of the committee burglarizing and bugging the Democratic headquarters, fake letters being written on Ed Muskie's stationery to make him look like a bigot, strange telephone calls in the middle of the night to white voters asking them to vote Democratic because the Democrats have been good to the black people.

This is not just gutter politics but guerrilla war, and it is not only wrong but illegal. But President Nixon does not follow the principle of Senator Nixon in the Checkers speech. And

even when the Air Force bombs Hanoi and blows up the French Mission in Hanoi during what the President calls a very delicate and critical stage in the peace negotiations in Paris, the people not only get no explanation but a suggestion from the Secretary of Defense that maybe North Vietnamese did it.

And what's worse, these destructive tactics are regarded by many people as being "very clever" and not a single member of the old "respectable Republican establishment" has asked the President publicly to speak out for the honor of the party and the Republic.